KASANE
5
daruma matsuura

5

KASANE

daruma matsuura

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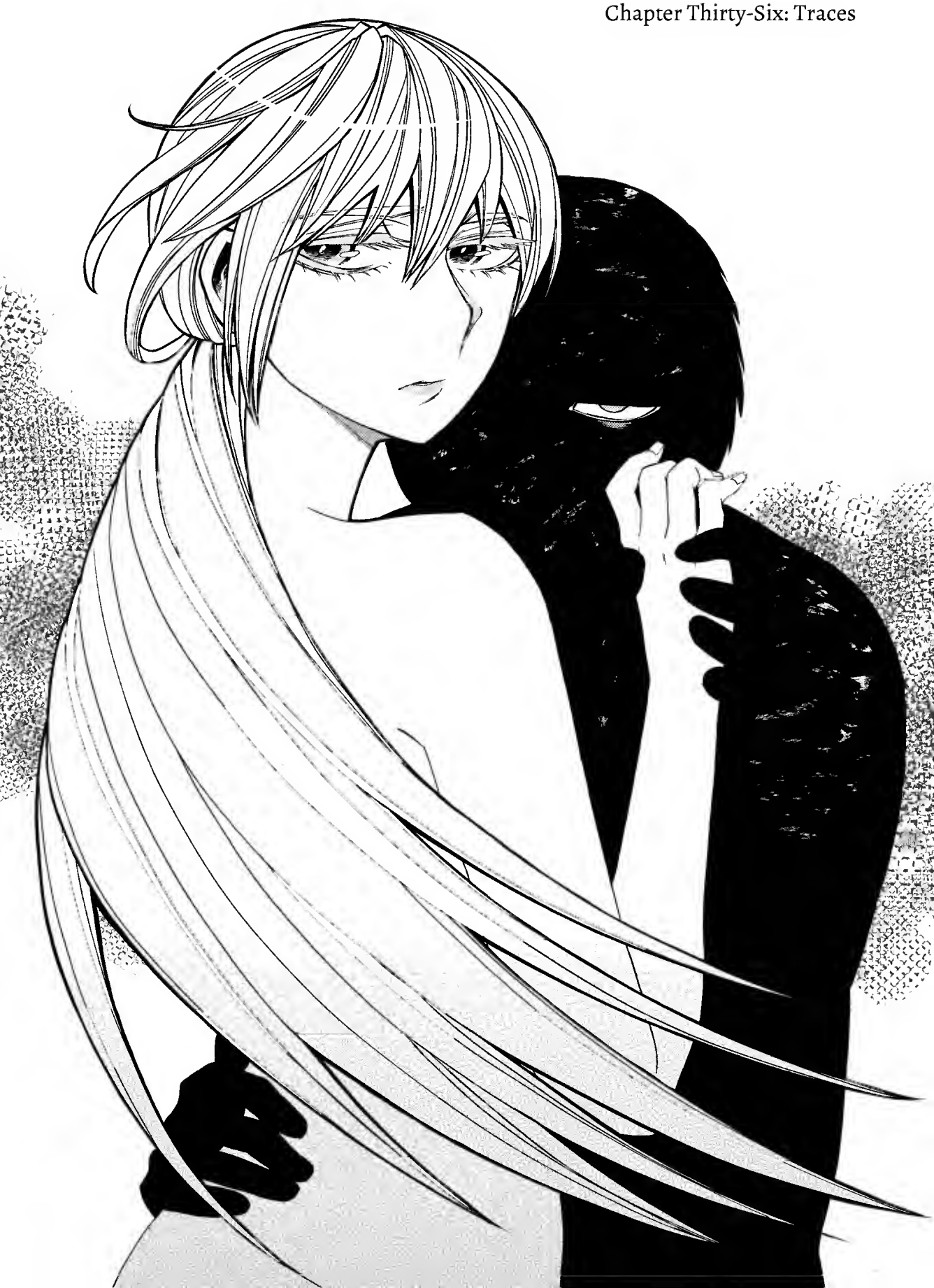
Chapter Thirty-Six: Traces



YES ...
I DID SAY THAT.
THAT'S WHY I'M THINKING ABOUT TRYING TO INVESTI-GATE HER ANOTHER WAY.
SO... PLEASE ...
DON'T LEAVE ME... NOGIKU-SAN.

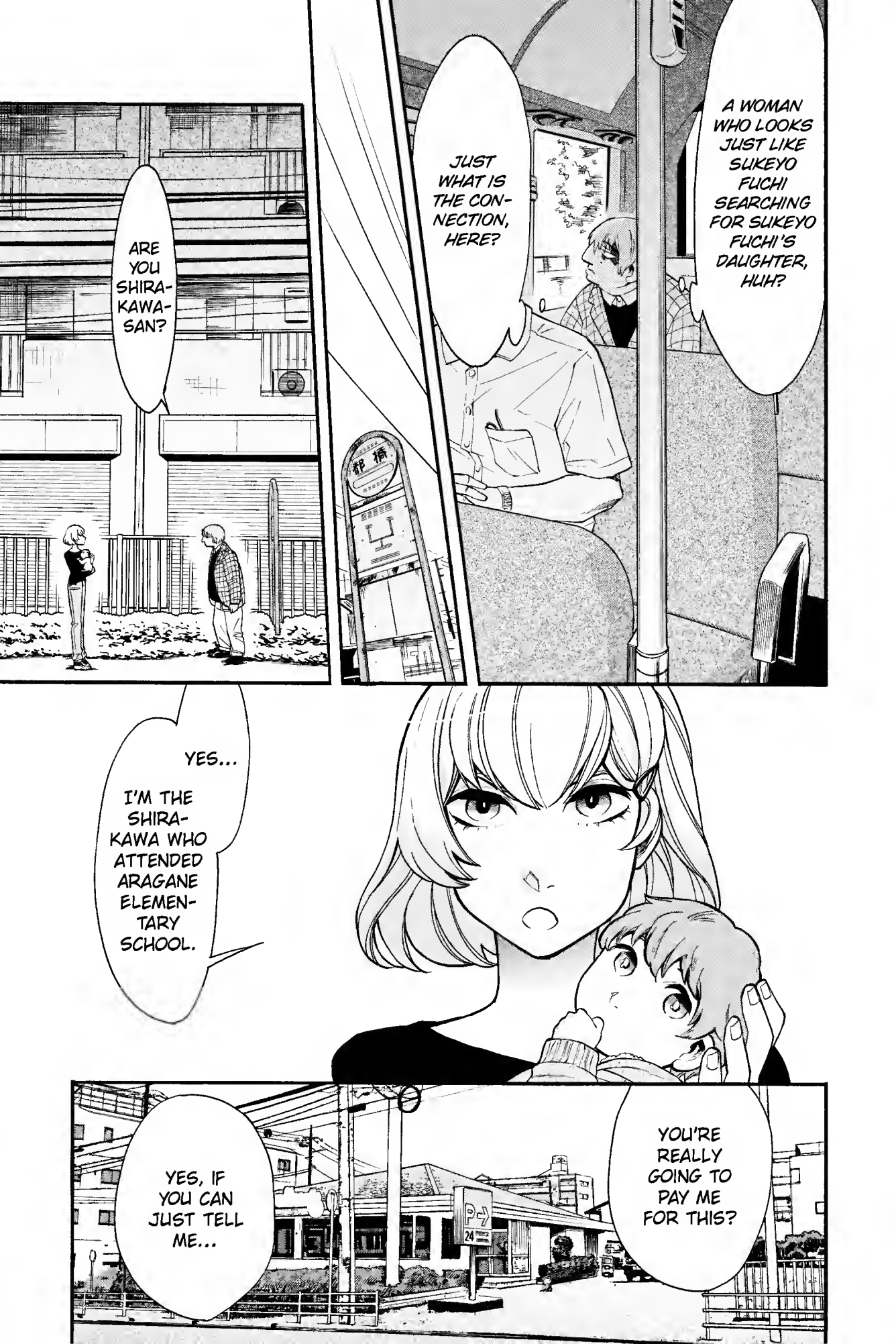
I MANAGED TO GET A HOLD OF THIS, JUST BARELY.
THESE ARE A FEW YEARS' WORTH OF STUDENT LISTS FROM THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL KASANE FUCHI ATTENDED.
IF YOU'VE GOT THE MONEY ...
THERE ARE SOURCES THAT WILL SELL YOU THIS SORT OF PRIVATE INFORMATION.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "ANOTHER WAY"?
...
HEH.
HOW IMPROPER FOR A TEACHER.
YOU'D GO THAT FAR ...

IT'S JUST THAT YOU'RE ...
I-I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU SAY ABOUT ME.
I...
IMPROPER FOR A TEACHER? SCREW THAT.
SCHOOL IS NOT THAT KIND OF MORALLY UPSTANDING PLACE!
MEN REALLY ARE FILTHY CREA-TURES.
JUST TO GET YOUR HANDS ON MY BODY?

ANYWAY, I'LL USE THESE STUDENT LISTS TO PROBE KASANE FUCHI'S CLASS-MATES.
IT'LL TAKE SOME TIME, BUT THERE'S NO OTHER WAY.
WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO USE AS YOUR EXCUSE FOR CONTACTING THEM?
WELL... I'LL SAY I'M A MAGAZINE REPORTER OR SOME-THING...
DOING AN ARTICLE ON SUKEYO FUCH-
GASP
SU-KEYO ...
FUCHI ?

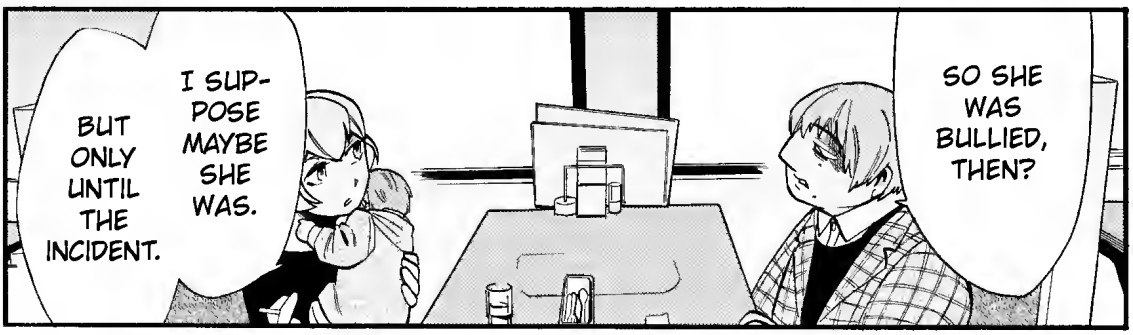
I CAN JUST SAY THAT I'M LOOKING FOR SUKEYO FUCHI'S DAUGHTER TO DO AN ARTICLE ON HER MOTHER...
...
RIGHT.
THEN... I'LL BE COUNTING ON YOU TO DO THAT, AMAGASAKI-SAN.

JUST MENTIONING SUKEYO FUCHI'S NAME PUT HER IN A BAD MOOD, HUH.
BUT ...


A WOMAN WHO LOOKS JUST LIKE SUKEYO FUCHI SEARCHING FOR SUKEYO FUCHI'S DAUGHTER, HUH?
JUST WHAT IS THE CONNECTION, HERE?
ARE YOU SHIRAKAWA-SAN?
YES... I'M THE SHIRAKAWA WHO ATTENDED ARAGANE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.
YOU'RE REALLY GOING TO PAY ME FOR THIS?
YES, IF YOU CAN JUST TELL ME...

...
DOESN'T LOOK LIKE HER MOTHER, DOES SHE?
THIS IS KASANE FUCHI.
Shou Nakahara
Hiro Arata
Kasane Fuchi
SHE DOESN'T.
THIS IS THAT STAR'S DAUGHTER.
AT THE TIME, NOBODY BELIEVED HER.

BUT SHE STILL KEPT ON BRAGGING THAT SHE WAS SUKEYO FUCHI'S DAUGHTER.
WELL, NOBODY LIKED HER. SHE WAS A GLOOMY PERSON.


SO SHE WAS BULLIED, THEN?
I SUP-POSE MAYBE SHE WAS.
BUT ONLY UNTIL THE INCIDENT.

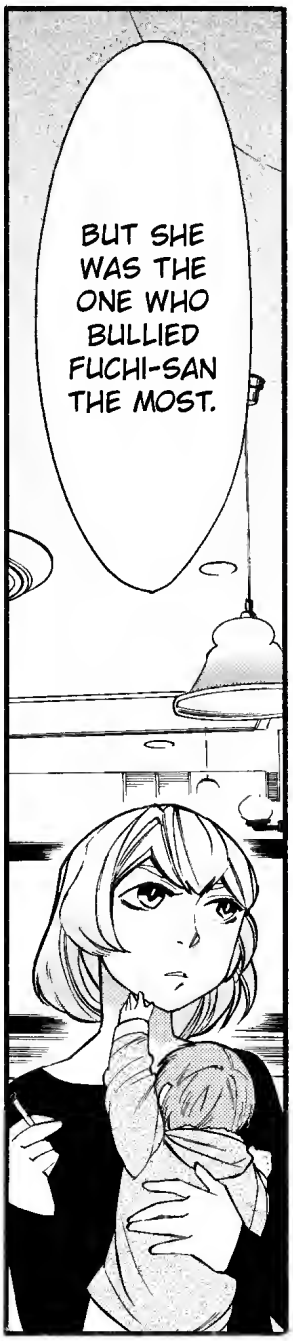
YEP.
ONE OF OUR CLASS-MATES DIED IN AN ACCIDENT.
A GIRL NAMED ICHIKA NISHI-ZAWA.
THEY SAID SHE FELL FROM THE ROOF OF THE SCHOOL.

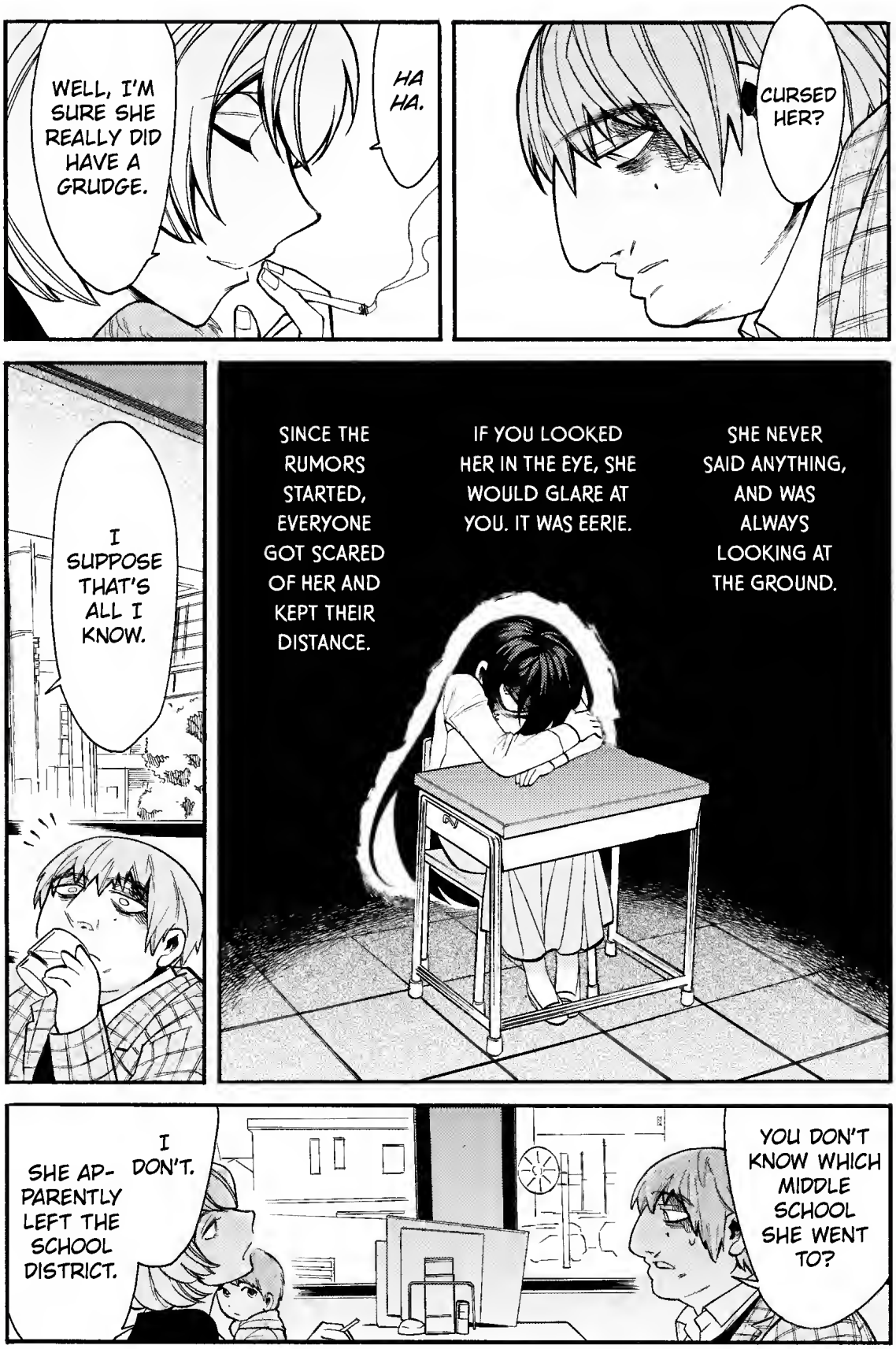
INCI-DENT?

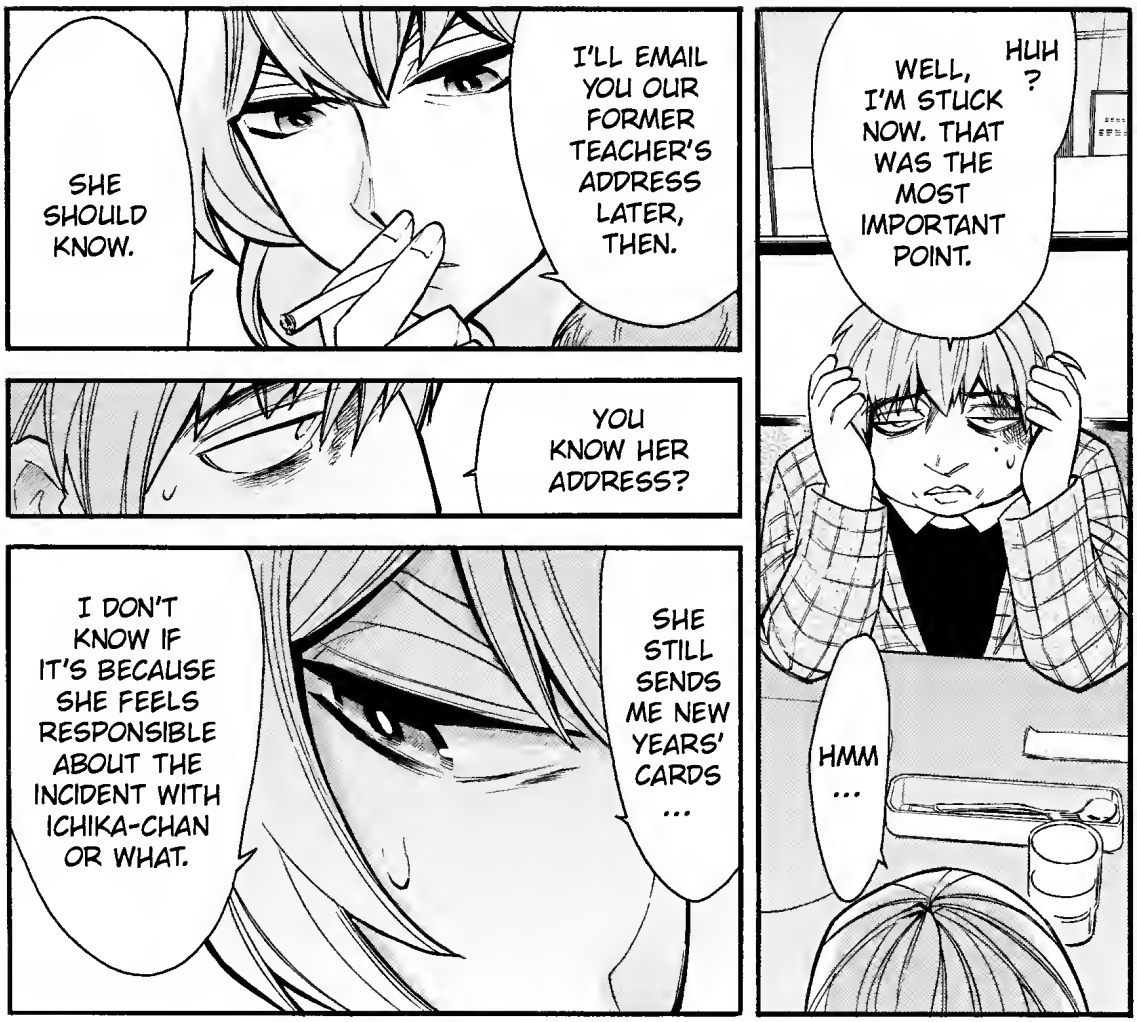
EVERYONE LOVED HER, AND SHE WAS SO CUTE.
WE ... WERE REALLY CLOSE FRIENDS.

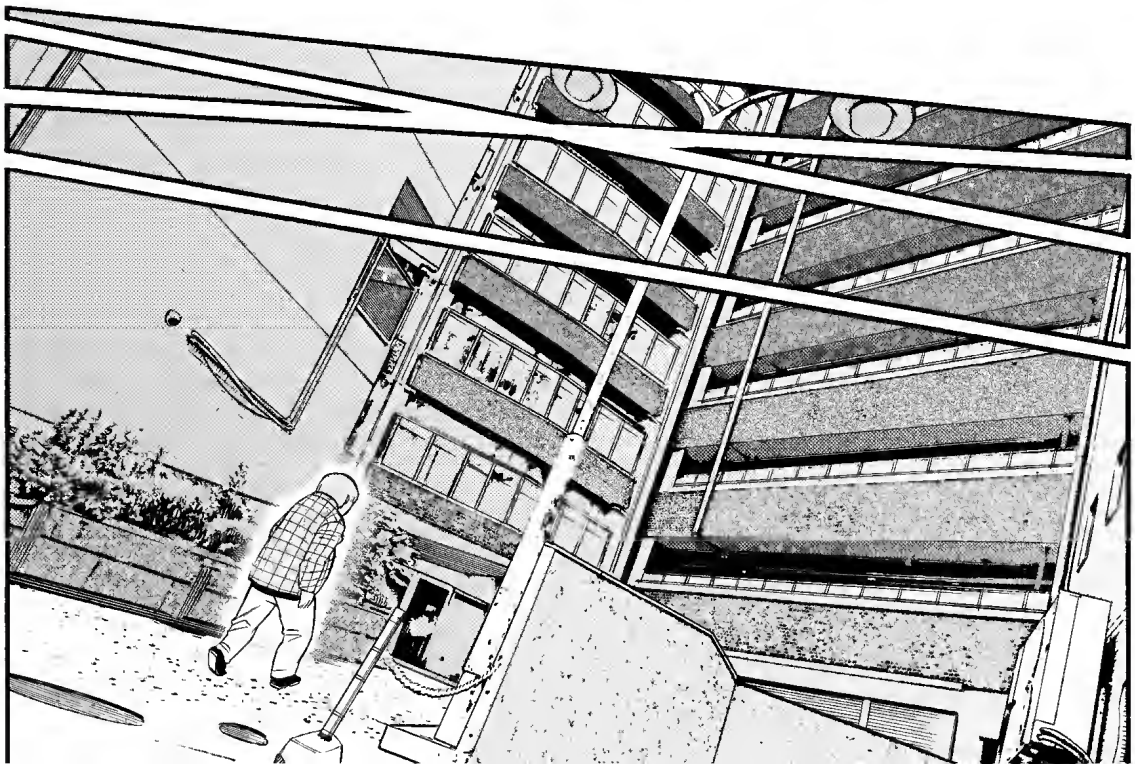
SO THEN THERE WERE RUMORS...

THAT KASANE FUCHI HAD CURSED ICHIKA NISHIZAWA TO DIE.

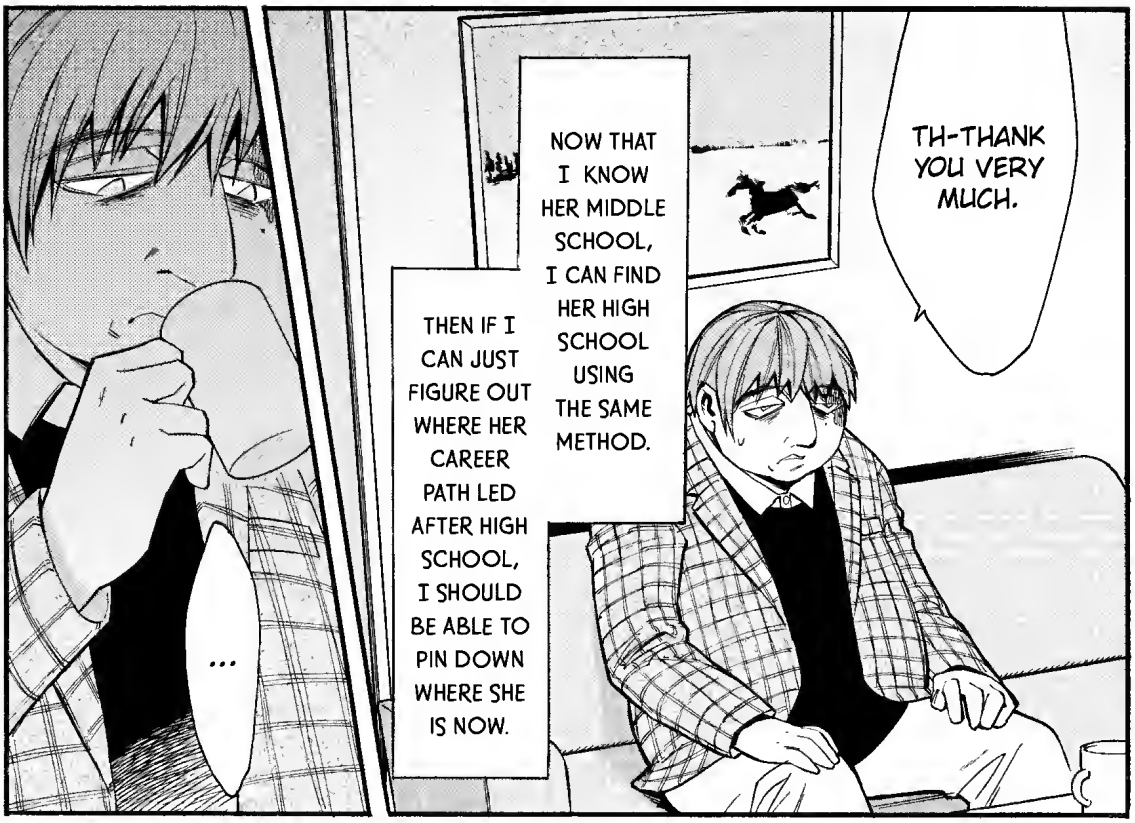

BUT SHE WAS THE ONE WHO BULLIED FUCHI-SAN THE MOST.


WELL, I'M SURE SHE REALLY DID HAVE A GRUDGE.
HA HA.
CURSED HER?
I SUPPOSE THAT'S ALL I KNOW.
SINCE THE RUMORS STARTED, EVERYONE GOT SCARED OF HER AND KEPT THEIR DISTANCE.
IF YOU LOOKED HER IN THE EYE, SHE WOULD GLARE AT YOU. IT WAS EERIE.
SHE NEVER SAID ANYTHING, AND WAS ALWAYS LOOKING AT THE GROUND.
SHE AP- PARENTLY LEFT THE SCHOOL DISTRICT.
I DON'T.
YOU DON'T KNOW WHICH MIDDLE SCHOOL SHE WENT TO?


HUH?
WELL, I'M STUCK NOW. THAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT POINT.
HMM...
I'LL EMAIL YOU OUR FORMER TEACHER'S ADDRESS LATER, THEN.
SHE SHOULD KNOW.
YOU KNOW HER ADDRESS?
SHE STILL SENDS ME NEW YEARS' CARDS...
I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S BECAUSE SHE FEELS RESPONSIBLE ABOUT THE INCIDENT WITH ICHIKA-CHAN OR WHAT.

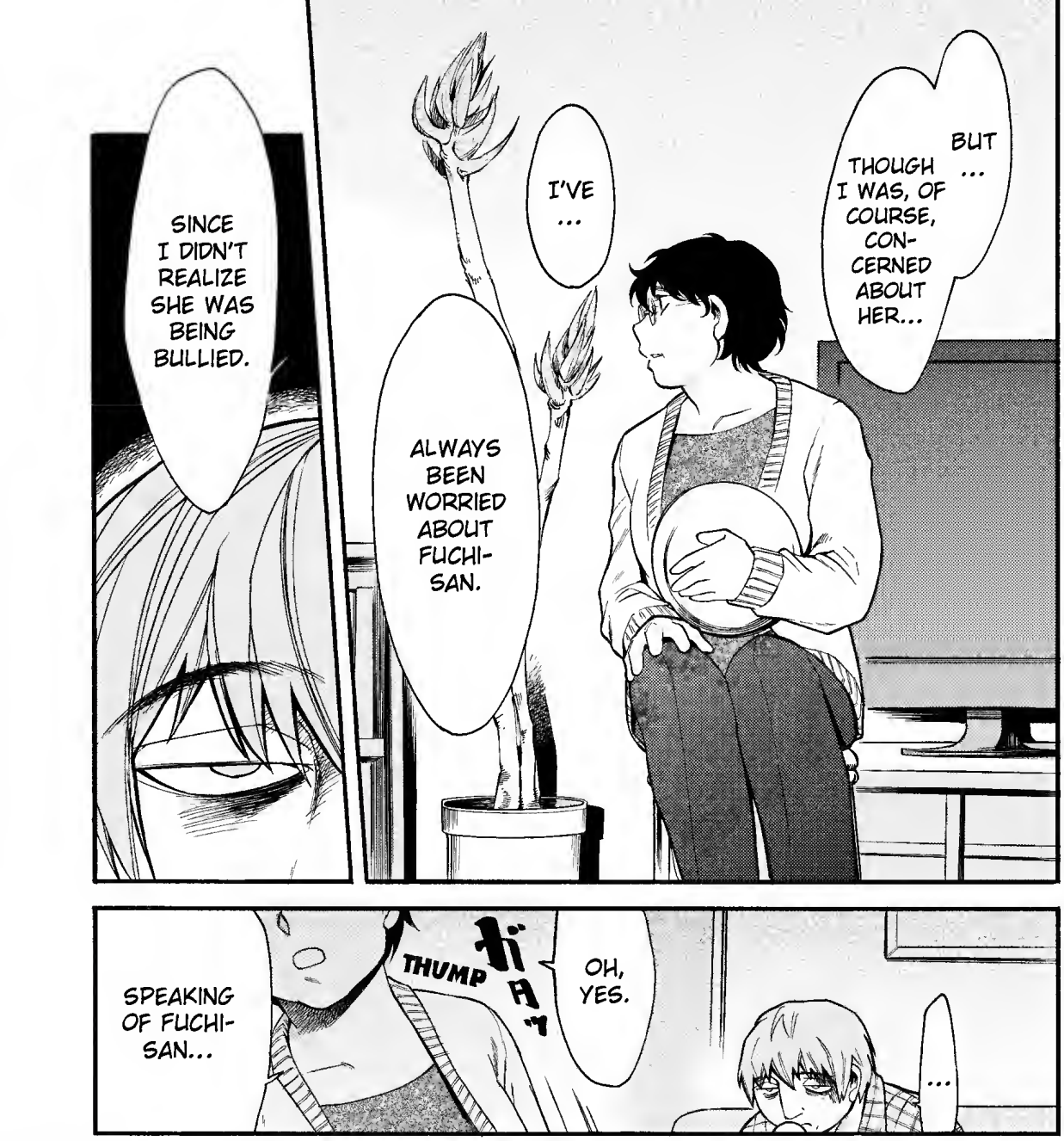


DING DONG
WHO IS IT?
U-UM ...
IS THIS CHIGA-SAKI-SENSEI, WHO TAUGHT AT ARAGANE ELEMENTA-RY?
I'D JUST LIKE TO TALK ABOUT THAT TIME...
YOU MEAN THE INCI-DENT?
N- NO.
I'M LOOKING FOR KASANE FUCHI-SAN, IN ORDER TO WRITE AN ARTICLE ON HER MOTHER, SUKEYO FUCHI.
...
CLACK
COME IN.
KA-SANE-SAN, HUH... THAT TAKES ME BACK.
I DON'T HAVE HER NUM-BER NOW, THOUGH.
BUT I THINK SHE WENT ON TO... AKIKAWA MIDDLE SCHOOL.

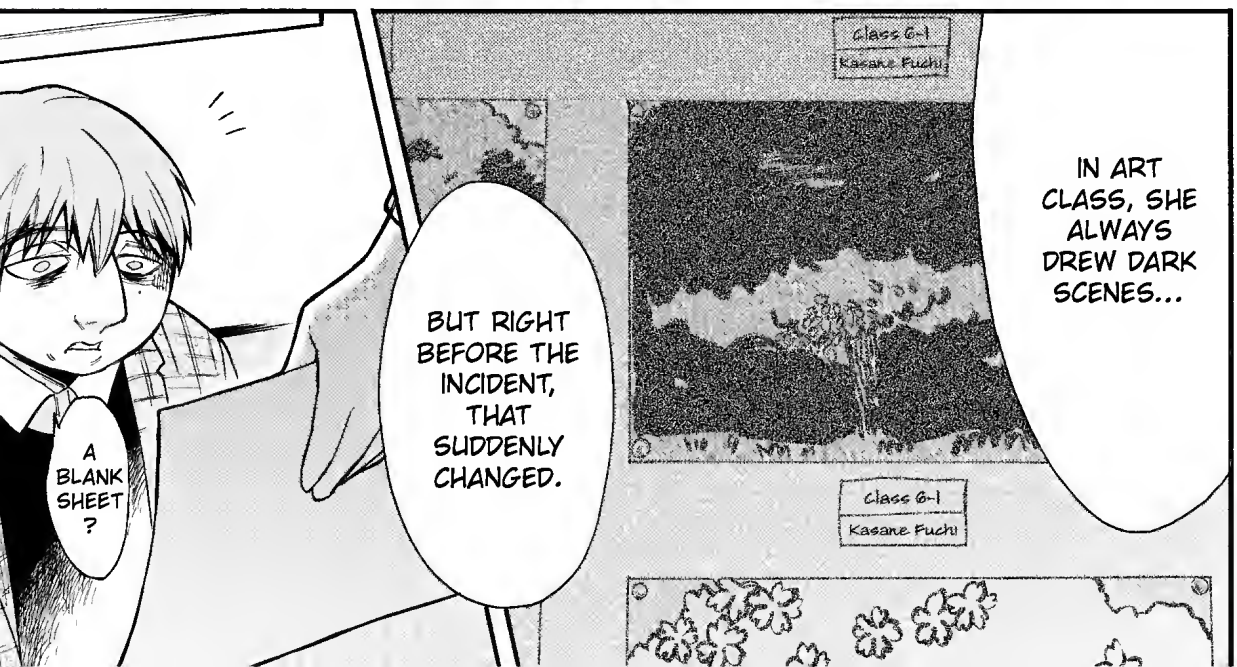

TH-THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
NOW THAT I KNOW HER MIDDLE SCHOOL, I CAN FIND HER HIGH SCHOOL USING THE SAME METHOD.
THEN IF I CAN JUST FIGURE OUT WHERE HER CAREER PATH LED AFTER HIGH SCHOOL, I SHOULD BE ABLE TO PIN DOWN WHERE SHE IS NOW.
...

I'M REALLY SORRY ABOUT THAT INCIDENT.
UM ...

POOR ICHIKA-CHAN...
... YES.


SINCE I DIDN'T REALIZE SHE WAS BEING BULLIED.
I'VE ...
ALWAYS BEEN WORRIED ABOUT FUCHI-SAN.
BUT ... THOUGH I WAS, OF COURSE, CON-CERNED ABOUT HER...

SPEAKING OF FUCHI-SAN...
THUMP
OH, YES.
...

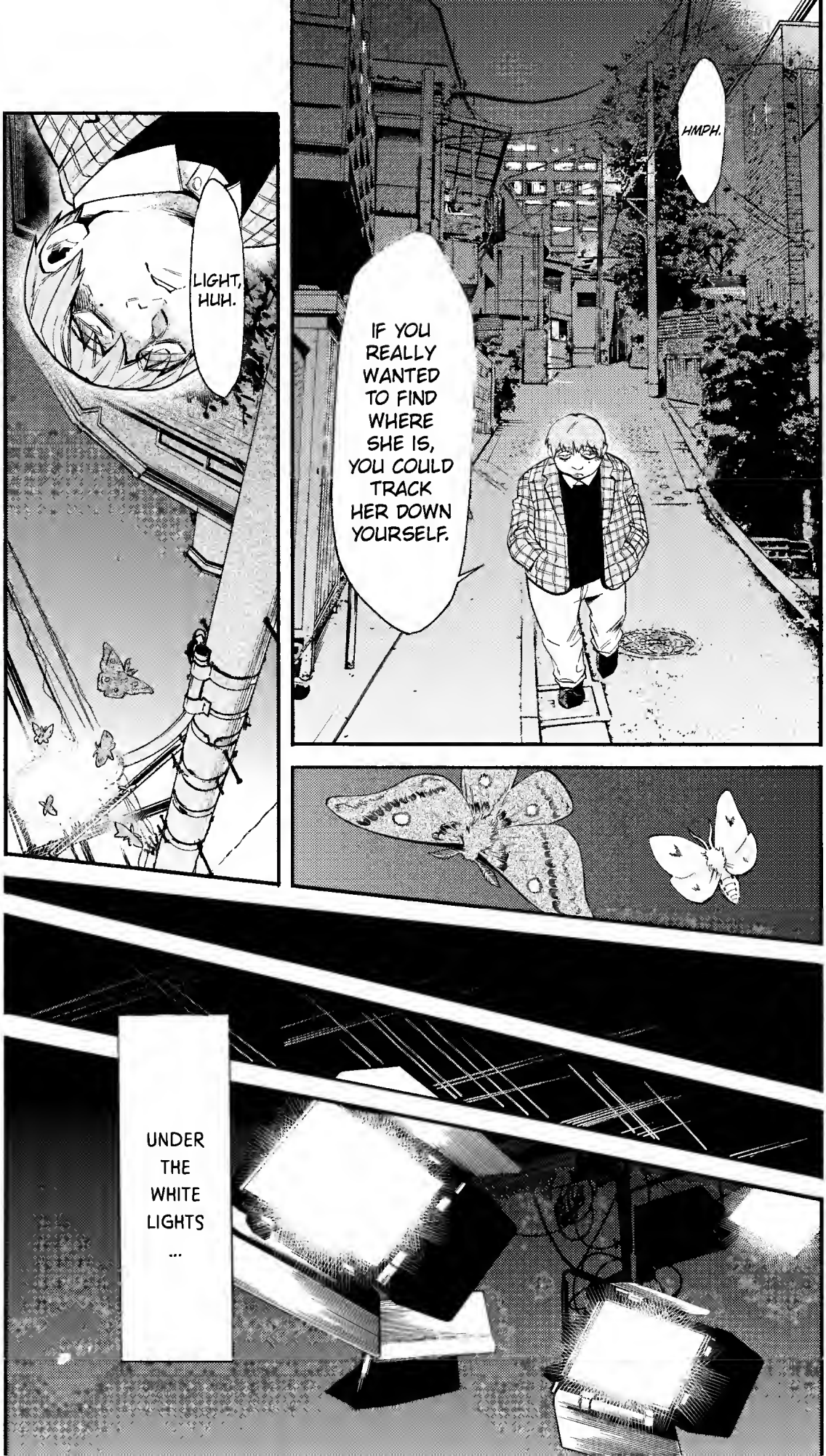

A BLANK SHEET?
BUT RIGHT BEFORE THE INCIDENT, THAT SUDDENLY CHANGED.
Class 6-1
Kasane Fuchi
IN ART CLASS, SHE ALWAYS DREW DARK SCENES...
Class 6-1
Kasane Fuchi

NO...
SHE PAINTED THIS OVER IN MANY LAYERS OF WHITE COLOR.
SHE WAS SO FOCUSED ON GOING AROUND AND AROUND, ALL THE WAY TO THE CORNERS OF THE PAPER.

LIGHT.
AT THE TIME, I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT SHE WAS DRAW-ING...
BUT NOW I THINK, FOR HER, THIS HAD TO BE SOME KIND OF ...

I WONDER IF SHE FOUND HER OWN LIGHT.
I WONDER HOW SHE'S DOING NOW?

IF YOU DO HAPPEN TO FIND HER ...
THEN PLEASE, TELL ME, TOO.


HMPH.
IF YOU REALLY WANTED TO FIND WHERE SHE IS, YOU COULD TRACK HER DOWN YOURSELF.
LIGHT, HUH.
UNDER THE WHITE LIGHTS ...

Chapter Thirty-Six: the end

KASANE

GIRLS: A NEW CHAPTER

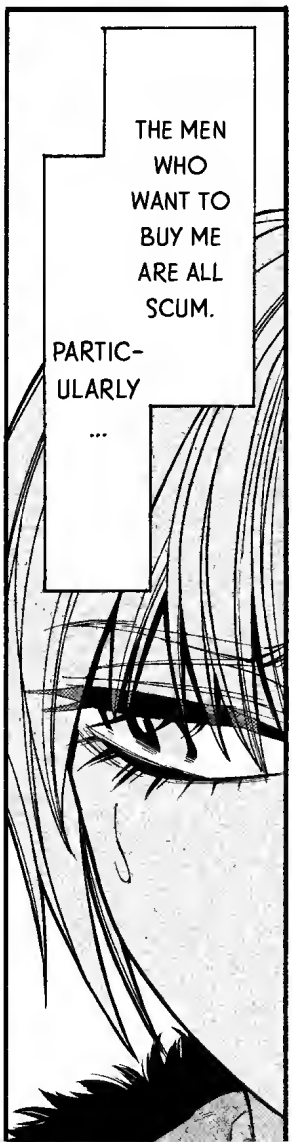
*Nogiku hasn't met Habuta-san yet, but I wanted to draw this, so I did.

Chapter Thirty-Seven: Won't See / Must Not See

OTEL
parking

...

ASAMIZO, THE ONE CLIENT I CUT TIES WITH RECENTLY, WAS VERY NASTY.


THE MEN WHO WANT TO BUY ME ARE ALL SCUM.
PARTIC-ULARLY ...

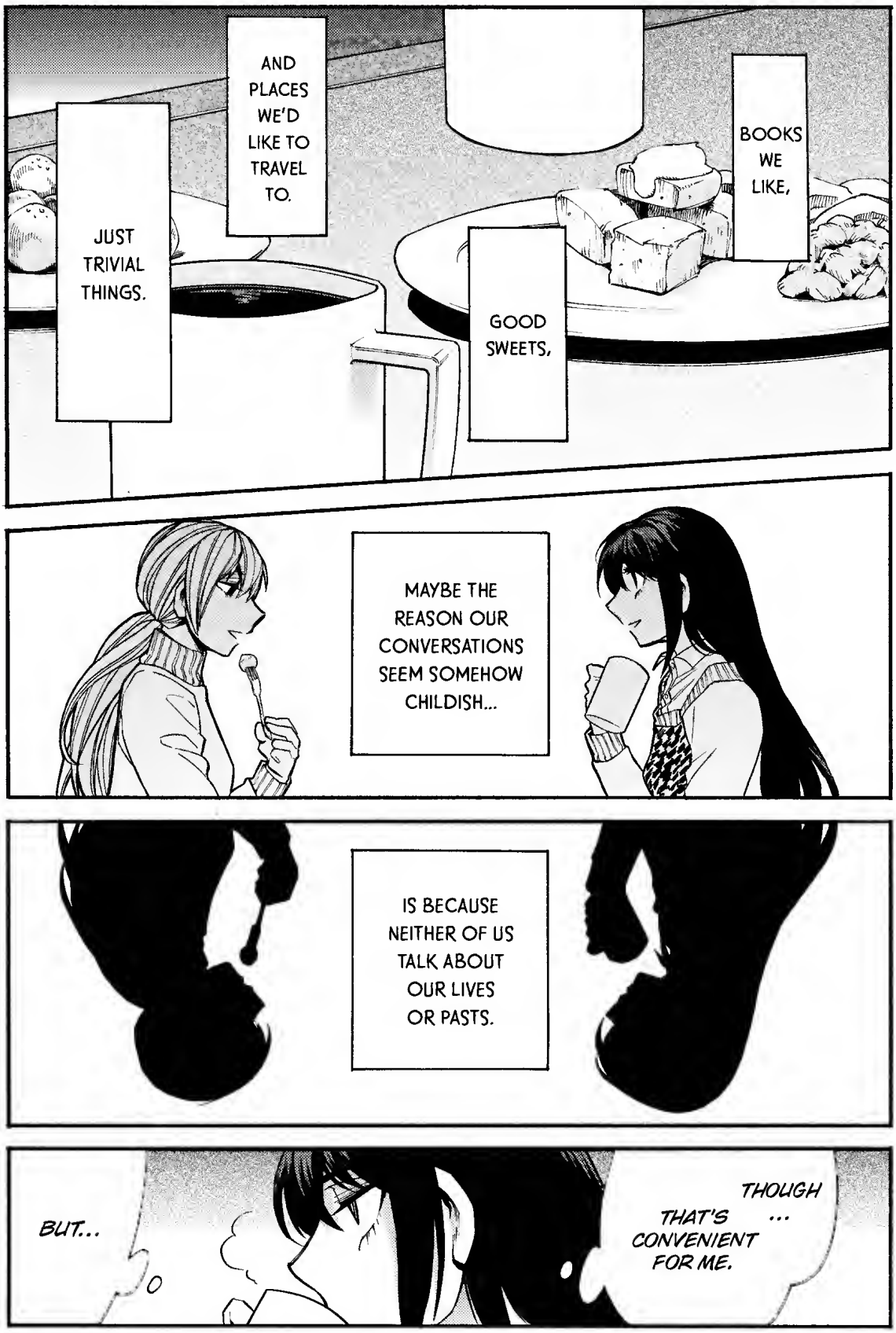
HUH? ALL RIGHT ...
U-UM... WOULD YOU MIND GOING TO A DIFFERENT HOTEL TODAY?

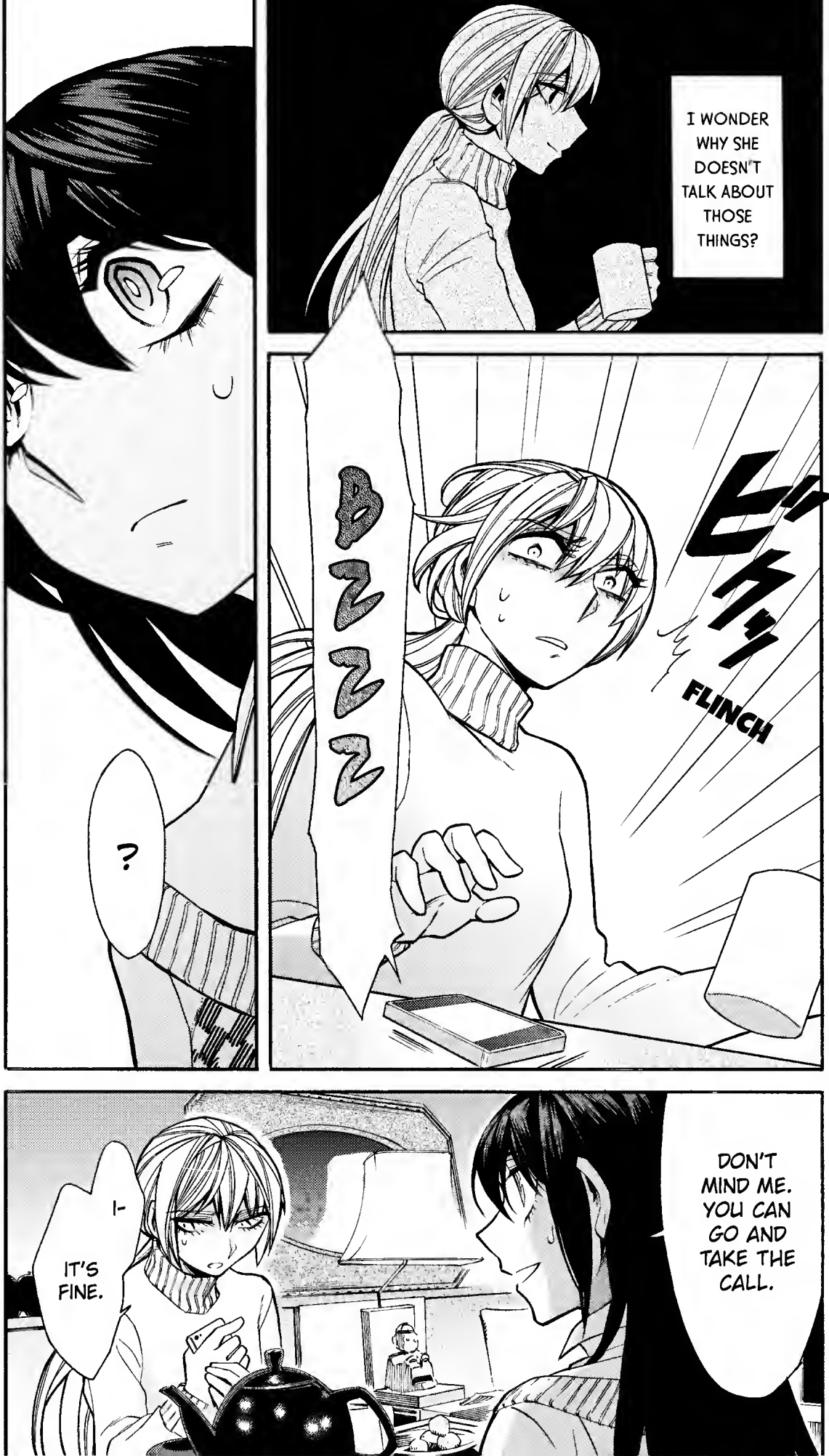
BZZZ
TWITCH
Inbox
Sender: Dai Asamizo
Why him and not me?
NO-GIKU-CHAN?!
HE WAS WAITING AT THE HOTEL FOR ME TO SHOW UP WITH A DIFFERENT CLIENT?
WHAT THE HELL IS HE DOING?

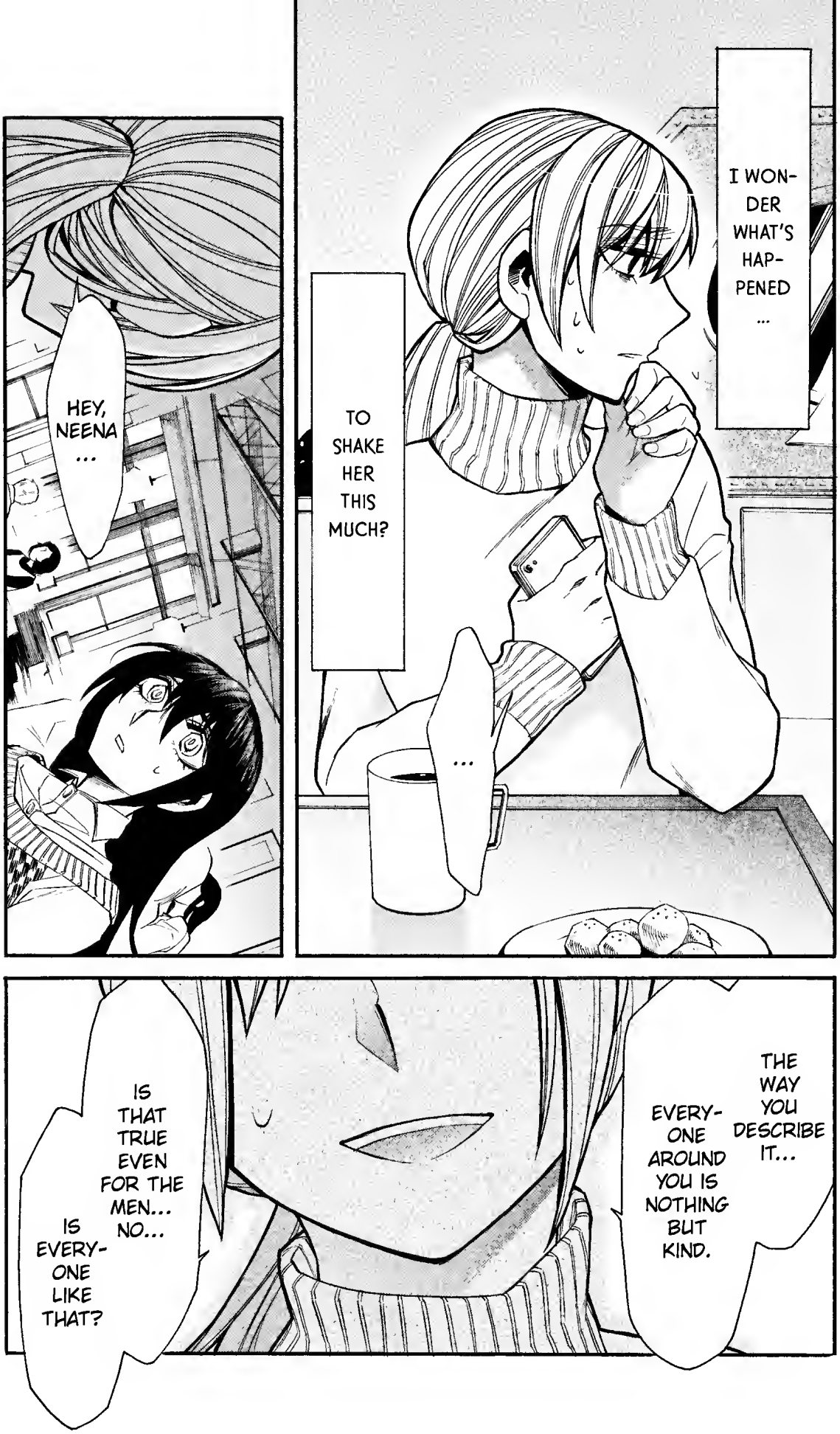
SO THEN ...
TO CELEBRATE TANIGUCHI-SAN'S BIRTHDAY,
WE KEPT THE PLAN A SECRET, AND PRETENDED WE WERE REHEARSING AS USUAL...

HE WAS SO SURPRISED!
TEE-HEE.
SUDDENLY, THEY WENT, "HAPPY BIRTHDAY!" AND WE BROUGHT OUT THE CAKE.
AND THEN RIGHT ON STAGE, FROM THE MIDDLE OF ONE OF THE ACTOR'S LINES,

I OFTEN TALK ABOUT WORK.
WITH PROS ACTING, HE'D NEVER FIGURE IT OUT UNTIL THE CAKE CAME OUT, HUH?
THAT'S WHAT MAKES IT SO MEAN, RIGHT?
ASIDE FROM THAT, WE TALK ABOUT ...


JUST TRIVIAL THINGS.
AND PLACES WE'D LIKE TO TRAVEL TO.
GOOD SWEETS,
BOOKS WE LIKE,
MAYBE THE REASON OUR CONVERSATIONS SEEM SOMEHOW CHILDISH...
IS BECAUSE NEITHER OF US TALK ABOUT OUR LIVES OR PASTS.
BUT...
THOUGH ...
THAT'S CONVENIENT FOR ME.


I WONDER WHY SHE DOESN'T TALK ABOUT THOSE THINGS?
ビクッ
FLINCH
ブブブブ
?
DON'T MIND ME. YOU CAN GO AND TAKE THE CALL.
I-
IT'S FINE.


I WONDER WHAT'S HAPPENED ...
TO SHAKE HER THIS MUCH?
...
HEY, NEENA ...
THE WAY YOU DESCRIBE IT...
EVERYONE AROUND YOU IS NOTHING BUT KIND.
IS THAT TRUE EVEN FOR THE MEN... NO...
IS EVERYONE LIKE THAT?

HMM... WELL.
THERE WERE SOME WHO SEEMED SCARY WHEN I FIRST MET THEM ...
BUT THEY'RE ALL GENERALLY GOOD PEOPLE.
...OH.
WHY DO YOU ASK?
JUST A LITTLE CURIOUS.
SMILE
IT'S GOT TO BE BECAUSE YOU'RE SO NICE.
SO YOU ATTRACT PEOPLE LIKE THAT.
...

...
I'M...
IT WAS A MAN'S NAME ON HER CALL DISPLAY.
"IS THAT TRUE EVEN FOR THE MEN...
IS EVERYONE LIKE THAT?"
A LITTLE WOR-RIED...

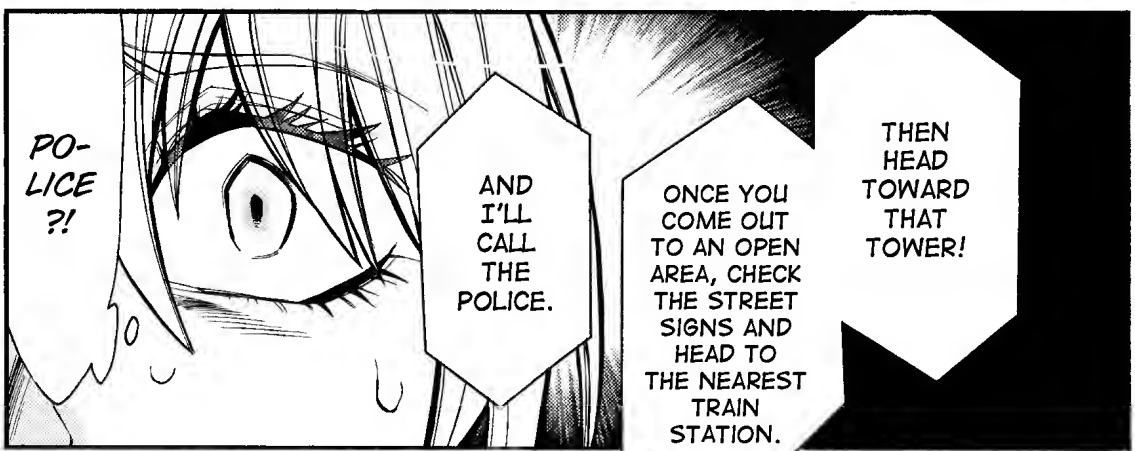
I CAN'T ...
TALK TO HER ABOUT IT. I REALLY CAN'T.
BZZ
BZZ
Sender: Dai Asamizo
Do you think you can get away?
...
Inbox
Sender : Dai Asamizo

ASA-MIZO ...
I-I'LL CALL AMAGA-SAKI-SAN.
ARING ARING ARING ARING
WHY WON'T HE PICK UP?!
THIS IS BAD ...
I'M GETTING FURTHER FROM THE BUSY STREETS ...
I DON'T KNOW THIS AREA WELL.

I-I...
I'M LOST ...

BZZZ
NOGI-KU?
N-NEENA ...
HELP ME!

WHAT'S GOING ON?!
A-A MAN IS FOLLOW-ING ME.
BUT I DON'T KNOW WHERE I AM...
YOU'RE LOST?!
TELL ME WHAT YOU CAN SEE FROM WHERE YOU ARE!
WHAT I CAN SEE ...
THERE'S... SOME-THING LIKE A TOWER FAR FROM HERE ...


THEN HEAD TOWARD THAT TOWER!
ONCE YOU COME OUT TO AN OPEN AREA, CHECK THE STREET SIGNS AND HEAD TO THE NEAREST TRAIN STATION.
AND I'LL CALL THE POLICE.
PO-LICE ?!

NO!
?!
...
I-I'M SORRY ...
BUT... DON'T CALL THE POLICE.
...FINE.
I'M HEADING OVER RIGHT NOW, SO HEAD FOR LIT STREETS!
AND ...
DON'T HANG UP THE PHONE.
I THINK IT'S BEST FOR YOU TO SHOW THAT YOU COULD CALL THE POLICE AT ANY TIME.

YEAH ...
OH!
HUH?
I-I CAN SEE A LIT STREET OVER THERE...
IT'S THE STA-TION!
はっ
GASP
THIS IS BAD.
THERE'S NO ONE ON THE STREET BUT ME AND ASAMIZO!
NO-GIKU ?!

CLACK
EEK!
YANK

I DID SO MUCH FOR YOU, I LOVED YOU... AND YOU FUCKING TRAM-PLED IT ALL!
AH!
WHACK
NEE-NA ...
NOGI-KU?!

NEENA
...
NEE-
NA
...!
!
IF...I
CAN'T
HAVE
YOU...
ギッ
SQUEEZE
ガッ
KICK
URK
...
SQUEEZE
SQUEEZE
...

Chapter Thirty-Seven: the end

PANT
PANT
PANT
WE MADE IT TO THE STATION FOR NOW ...
PANT
BUT THAT MAN ... MIGHT KEEP FOLLOW-ING US HERE.
NOGI-KU,
WHERE DO YOU LIVE? I'LL TAKE YOU HOME.

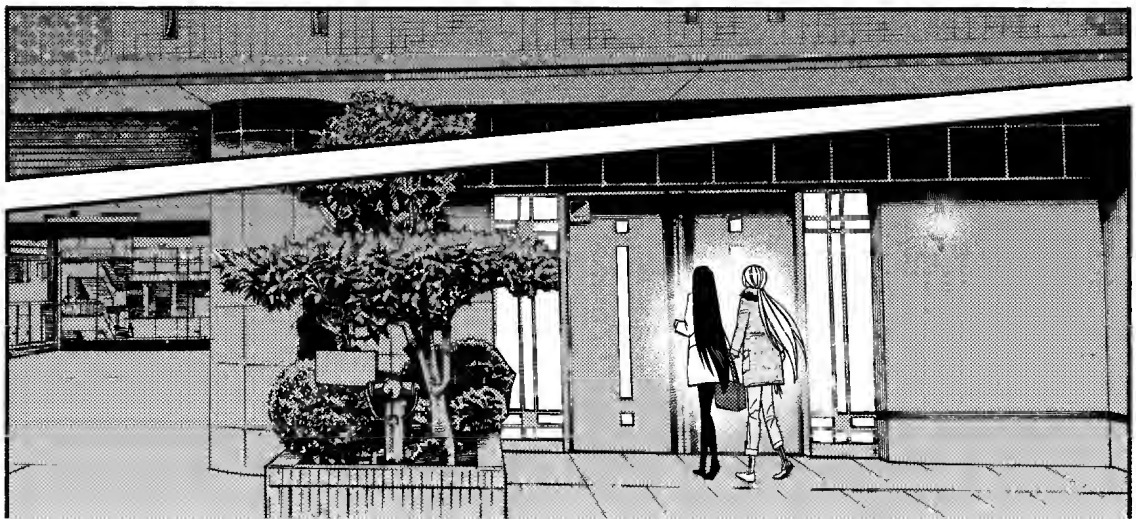
Chapter Thirty-Eight: Outstretched Hand

HEY... ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
I DON'T ...
I DON'T ...
HAVE A HOME...
WH- WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
...
THEN ... DO YOU HAVE FAMILY, OR FRIENDS YOU COULD STAY WITH?
...NO.

PLEASE ...
DON'T LEAVE ME ALONE!
THEN... I COULD TAKE YOU TO A HOTEL SOMEWH-
NEE-NA ...
...
NO-GIKU ...
OF COURSE ...
SHE JUST HAD A REALLY FRIGHTENING EXPERIENCE.

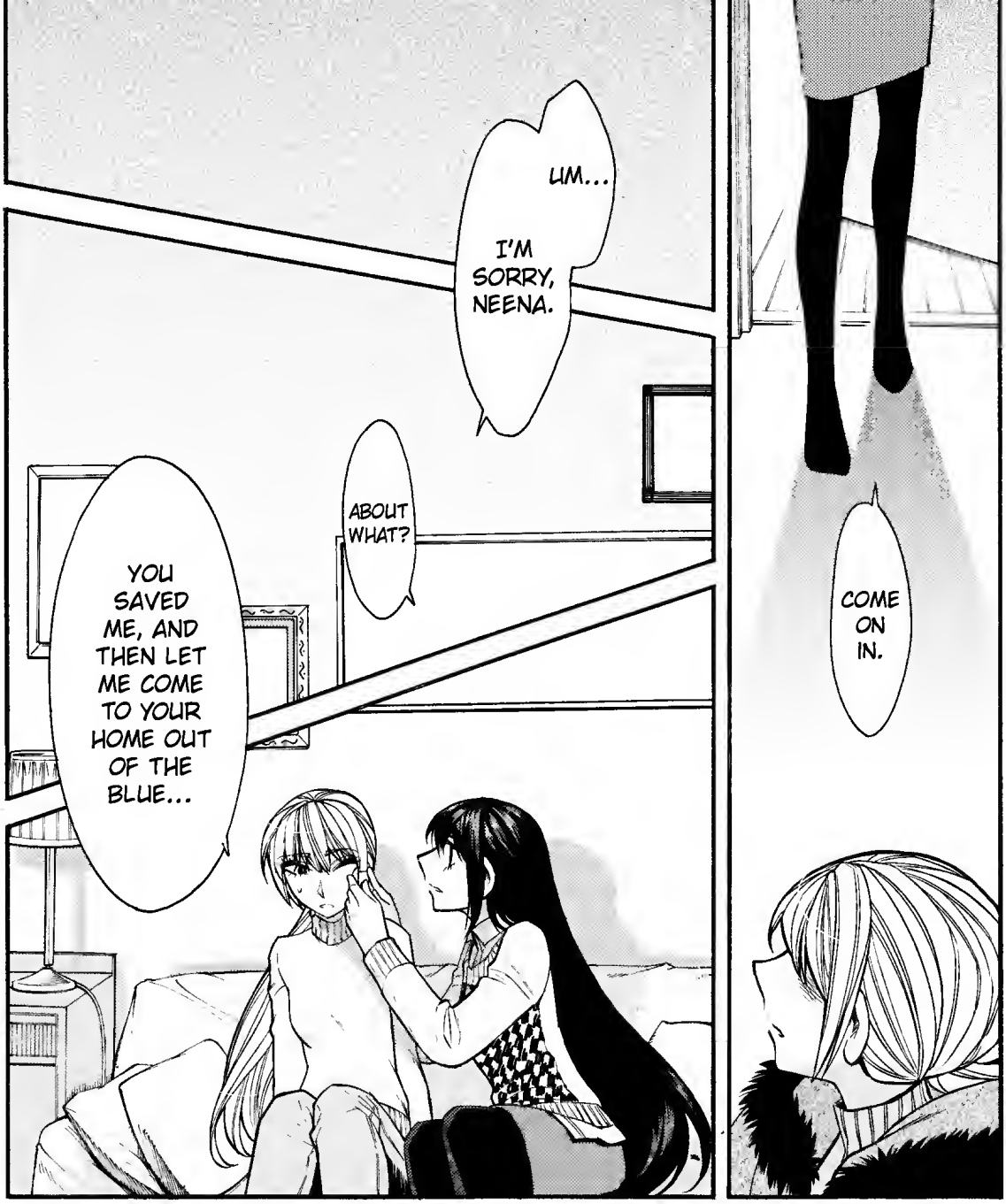
BUT I'M STUCK, NOW.
I CAN'T LEAVE HER ALONE, AND WE CAN'T STAY HERE FOREVER.
BUT I DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME UNTIL THE LIPSTICK WEARS OFF.
WHAT DO I DO?

...



THANKS FOR HAVING ME...
HOLD ON RIGHT THERE FOR A SEC! I'M GOING TO GO CLEAN THINGS UP.
バタン
THUMP
THERE'S ...

SOMETHING WRONG WITH ME.
LETTING SOMEONE IN HERE, NO MATTER HOW CLOSE A FRIEND SHE IS...
IF THINGS GO WRONG, THIS IS GOING TO DESTROY ME.


UM...
I'M SORRY, NEENA.
ABOUT WHAT?
YOU SAVED ME, AND THEN LET ME COME TO YOUR HOME OUT OF THE BLUE...
COME ON IN.

DON'T STRESS OVER THAT.
THANK YOU.
HEY, NEENA ...

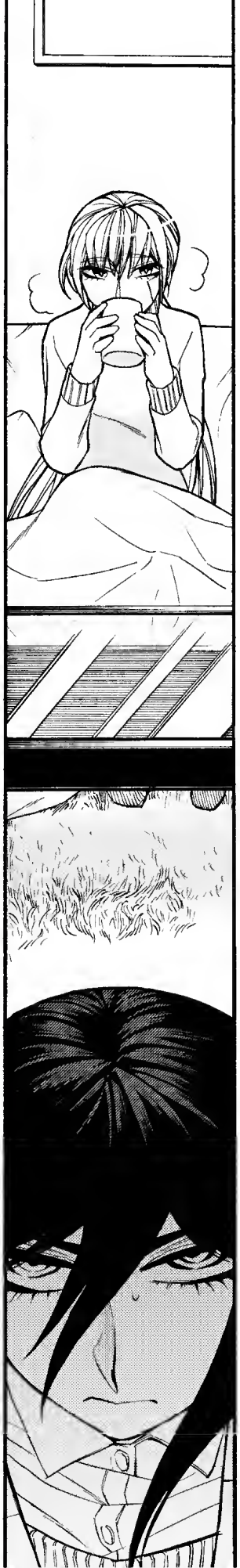
...
NO HOME AND NO FAMILY ...
AND SHE HAD THAT CLOSE CALL, TOO...
NO ONE'S EVER COME TO HELP ME BEFORE ...
WHEN YOU SHOWED UP... I WAS REALLY GLAD...
HOW CAN YOUR LIFE BE SO MISERABLE?!
YOU'VE GOT AMAZING GOOD LOOKS! PEOPLE WOULD MISTAKE YOU FOR *THE* LEGENDARY ACTRESS!

BNN
HABUTA-SAN? AT A TIME LIKE THIS...
IT'S A WORK CALL.
I'M GOING TO GO OUT-SIDE TO TALK FOR A BIT.
I'LL BE LEAVING YOU ALL ALONE, THOUGH...
I'LL BE FINE HERE.
THAT'S GOOD TO HEAR.
SMILE
OH, YES.
DON'T OPEN THAT DOOR.
IT'S REALLY MESSY IN THERE.
OKAY.
...IT'S OKAY. THAT ROOM IS LOCKED.
AND EVEN IF SHE WERE TO SEE INSIDE, THERE'S NO WAY SHE COULD FIND OUT ABOUT THE LIPSTICK.

HELLO ?

'Sup!

YEAH.
IT'S A LITTLE HEAVY TO DISCUSS OVER THE PHONE.
WE NEEDED TO MEET IN PERSON FOR THIS?



PLEASE MAKE IT SHORT.
THUMP
YEAH, YEAH.
THE FIRST THING IS ABOUT THE MAN WHO'S SEARCHING FOR YOU— SEARCHING FOR KASANE FUCHI.

I ASKED MINEYO-SAN IF SHE'S STILL GETTING WEIRD CALLS...
AND APPARENTLY, SHE GOT A CALL, NOT FROM A MAN, BUT FROM YOUR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER.

SHE SAID A MAN CAME TO VISIT HER HOUSE SEARCHING FOR YOU...
AND THAT MADE HER CURIOUS ABOUT WHAT YOU WERE UP TO, SO SHE TRIED TO GET A HOLD OF YOU.

CHIGASAKI-SENSEI, I THINK SHE SAID.
OH... THE ONE FROM SIXTH GRADE.

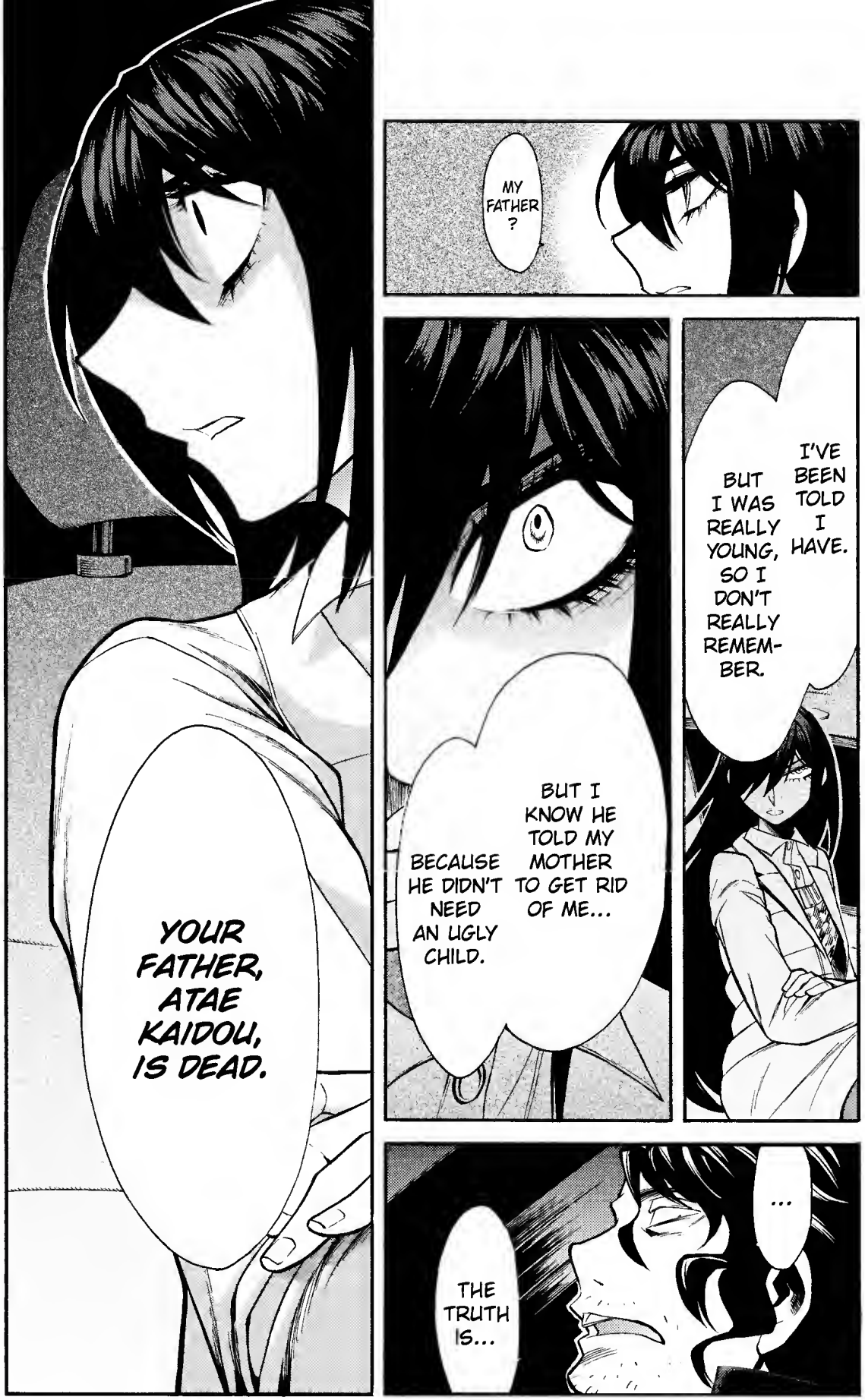
I WONDER HOW HE TRACKED DOWN MY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER ...
WHO KNOWS?
ANYWAY, HE SAID HE WAS A WRITER WHO'D COME TO DO AN INTERVIEW FOR AN ARTICLE ABOUT SUKEYO FUCHI.

WHEN I LOOKED INTO IT, THE NAME AND COMPANY THAT WERE ON HIS BUSINESS CARD DON'T EXIST.

HE'S GOING TO THESE LENGTHS TO FIND YOU...
SO IT'S EERIE NOT TO KNOW WHAT HE WANTS.

YES ...
WHAT EXACTLY DOES HE WANT TO FIND ME FOR?

HE SHOULD EVENTUALLY FIND OUT THAT KASANE FUCHI IS IN A VEGETATIVE STATE.
ANYWAY, AT THIS RATE...
YEAH.
I CAN'T THINK OF ANY REASON HE'D KEEP TRYING TO MEDDLE WITH SOMEONE WHO'S BASICALLY DEAD...
WE CAN HOPE HE STOPS PRYING AT THAT POINT.
IF HE'S A STRANGER. BUT...
HAVE YOU EVER MET YOUR FATHER?
?
NOW THIS IS A CHANGE OF TOPIC, BUT...


YOUR FATHER, ATAE KAIDOU, IS DEAD.
MY FATHER?
I'VE BEEN TOLD I HAVE.
BUT I WAS REALLY YOUNG, SO I DON'T REALLY REMEMBER.
BUT I KNOW HE TOLD MY MOTHER TO GET RID OF ME...
BECAUSE HE DIDN'T NEED AN UGLY CHILD.
...
THE TRUTH IS...

BZZZ
TWITCH
OH... IT'S AMAGA-SAKI-SAN.
IT'S RATHER LATE FOR HIM TO BE CALLING BACK NOW.

I'M SORRY I COULDN'T ANSWER THE PHONE.
IT'S ALREADY DONE, SO NEVER MIND.
ACTUALLY, I WAS AT THE HOSPITAL.
THE HOSPI-TAL?
YES.
OH, I'M NOT SICK, THOUGH.
IT'S THE HOSPITAL WHERE KASANE FUCHI WAS.
...A VEGE-TATIVE STATE?

YES. SHE'S UNCONSCIOUS, AND SHE ISN'T WAKING UP.
THEY SAID SHE JUMPED FROM THE ROOF OF A BUILDING.
A SUICIDE ATTEMPT?
PER-HAPS.
THE POOR THING... IZANA'S CHILD...
SO...
I HIT A WALL, AND STILL DON'T KNOW WHERE SHE IS.

I SEE.
SO THIS IS THE END, HUH?
I WANTED TO MEET HER, BUT IF THAT'S HOW IT IS...
BUT...

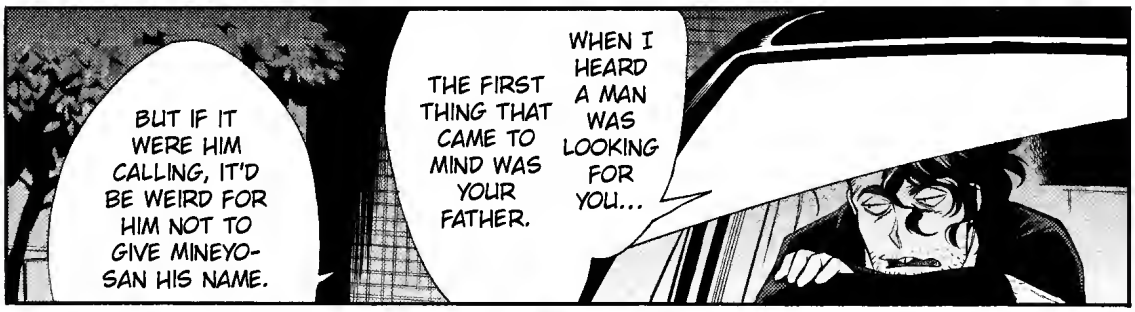
APPARENTLY, SHE WAS A FAMOUS STAGE ACTRESS' ASSISTANT.
HER NAME IS NEENA TAN-ZAWA.
WH-WHAT ...
DID YOU JUST SAY?
SHE WAS AN ASSIS-TANT--
WHY?
NO! AFTER THAT!
YOU MEAN "NEENA TAN-ZAWA"?
HOW?
KASANE FUCHI AND NEENA ARE CON-NECTED?

Chapter Thirty-Eight: the end

CLACK
IT'S LOCKED...

Chapter Thirty-Nine: Filthy Palms

MY FA-THER ...
IS DEAD?


WHEN I HEARD A MAN WAS LOOKING FOR YOU...
THE FIRST THING THAT CAME TO MIND WAS YOUR FATHER.
BUT IF IT WERE HIM CALLING, IT'D BE WEIRD FOR HIM NOT TO GIVE MINEYO-SAN HIS NAME.

AFTER SUKEYO FUCHI'S DEATH, HE WAS RARELY SEEN IN PUBLIC.
I THOUGHT HE WOULDN'T GIVE ME THE TIME OF DAY, BUT...

JUST IN CASE, I WENT TO VISIT HIM TO SEE WHAT HE'S UP TO NOW.

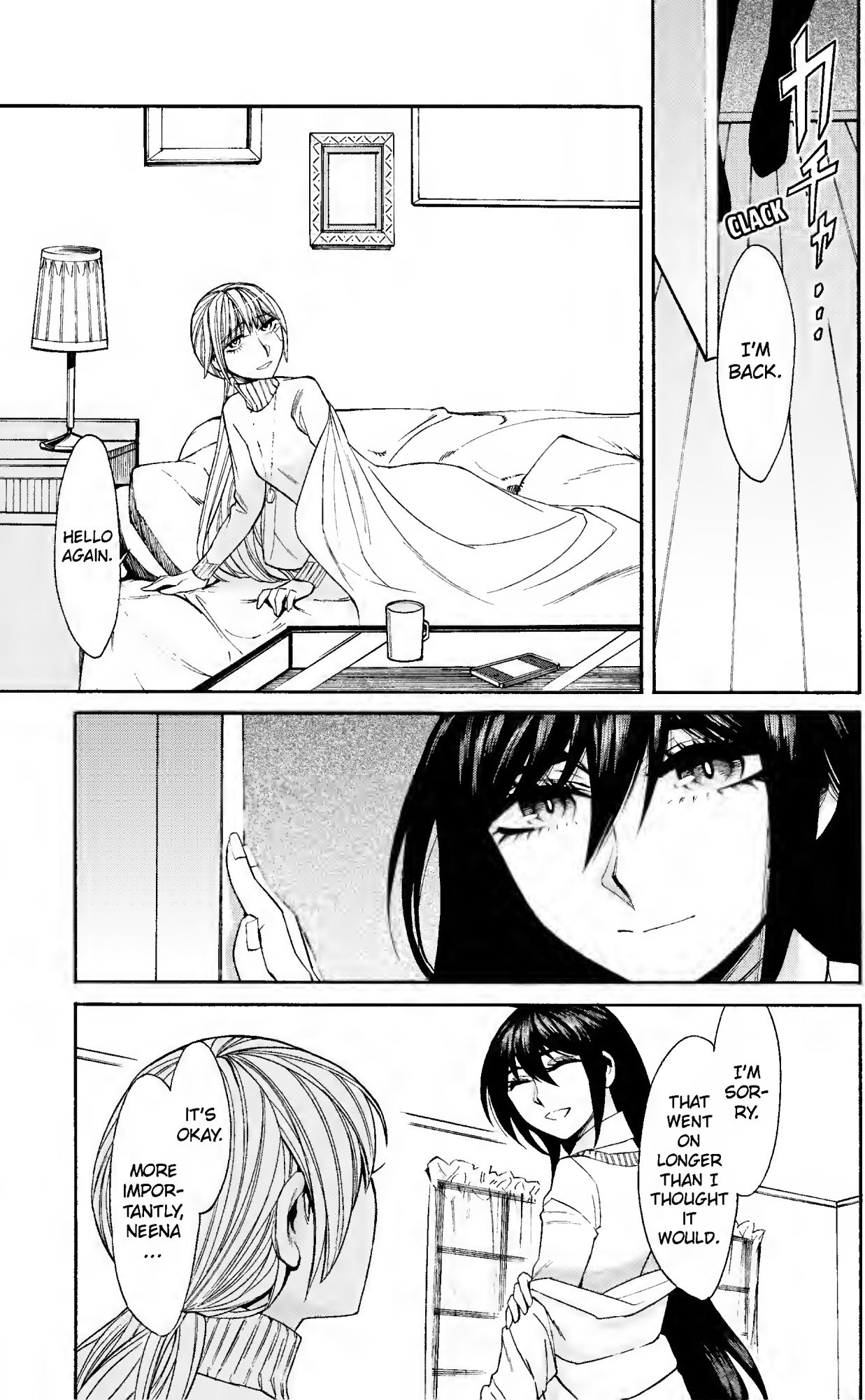
WHEN I SAW THE GATES WERE OPEN, I FELT SOMETHING WAS STRANGE.
THEN WHEN I STOOD AT THE ENTRANCE, THAT WAS LEFT OPEN, TOO...
AND I SMELLED DEATH.

Y-YOU FOUND HIM...
HA-BUTA-SAN?

KAIDOU WAS IN THE BEDROOM ON THE SECOND FLOOR OF THE MANSION...
YEAH.

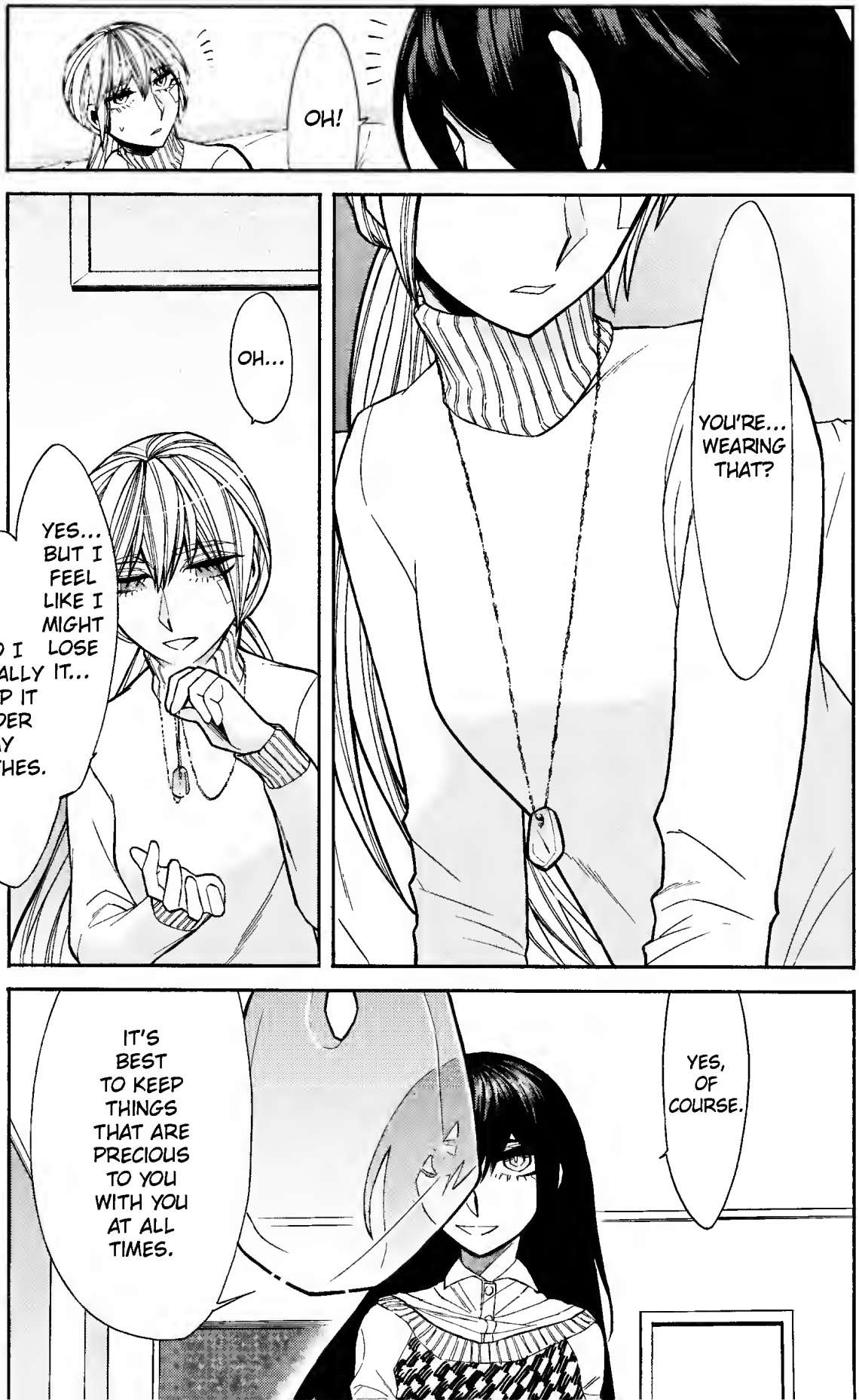
AND SOME-ONE HAD KILLED HIM.
WHAT ?
WHO?!
I DUNNO.
BY THE WAY, I HAVEN'T REPORT-ED IT TO THE POLICE.
WE CAN'T HAVE THAT MANSION BEING INVESTI-GATED.
I LOCKED THE DOOR AND GATE JUST IN CASE...
BUT YOU KEEP QUIET ABOUT THIS, TOO.

BUT... A MAN HAS DIED!
WOULDN'T HIDING THAT BE A CRIME ...
A CRIME ?
WHY'RE YOU SAYING THAT NOW?
YEAH ...
AT THIS POINT ...
WITH THESE FILTHY HANDS ...


カチャ…
CLACK
I'M BACK.
HELLO AGAIN.
I'M SORRY.
THAT WENT ON LONGER THAN I THOUGHT IT WOULD.
IT'S OKAY.
MORE IMPORTANTLY, NEENA …

THERE WAS SOME NOISE BEHIND THAT DOOR A LITTLE WHILE AGO...
DO YOU HAVE A CAT OR SOME-THING?

I DON'T HAVE ANY PETS.
WELL, I WAS RUSH-ING TO TIDY THINGS UP THERE EARLI-ER.
I'M SURE IT'S JUST THAT SOMETHING I STUFFED AWAY TOO QUICKLY FELL.


OH!
OH...
YES... BUT I FEEL LIKE I MIGHT LOSE IT... SO I USUALLY KEEP IT UNDER MY CLOTHES.
YOU'RE... WEARING THAT?
IT'S BEST TO KEEP THINGS THAT ARE PRECIOUS TO YOU WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES.
YES, OF COURSE.

JUST LIKE YOUR MEMENTO?

THIS ISN'T GOOD... I KEEP LETTING MY GUARD DOWN AROUND HER.
HOW DO I EXPLAIN THIS AWAY?
YOUR MOTHER... IS GONE, TOO, HUH?
MINE, TOO—
NOGIKU...

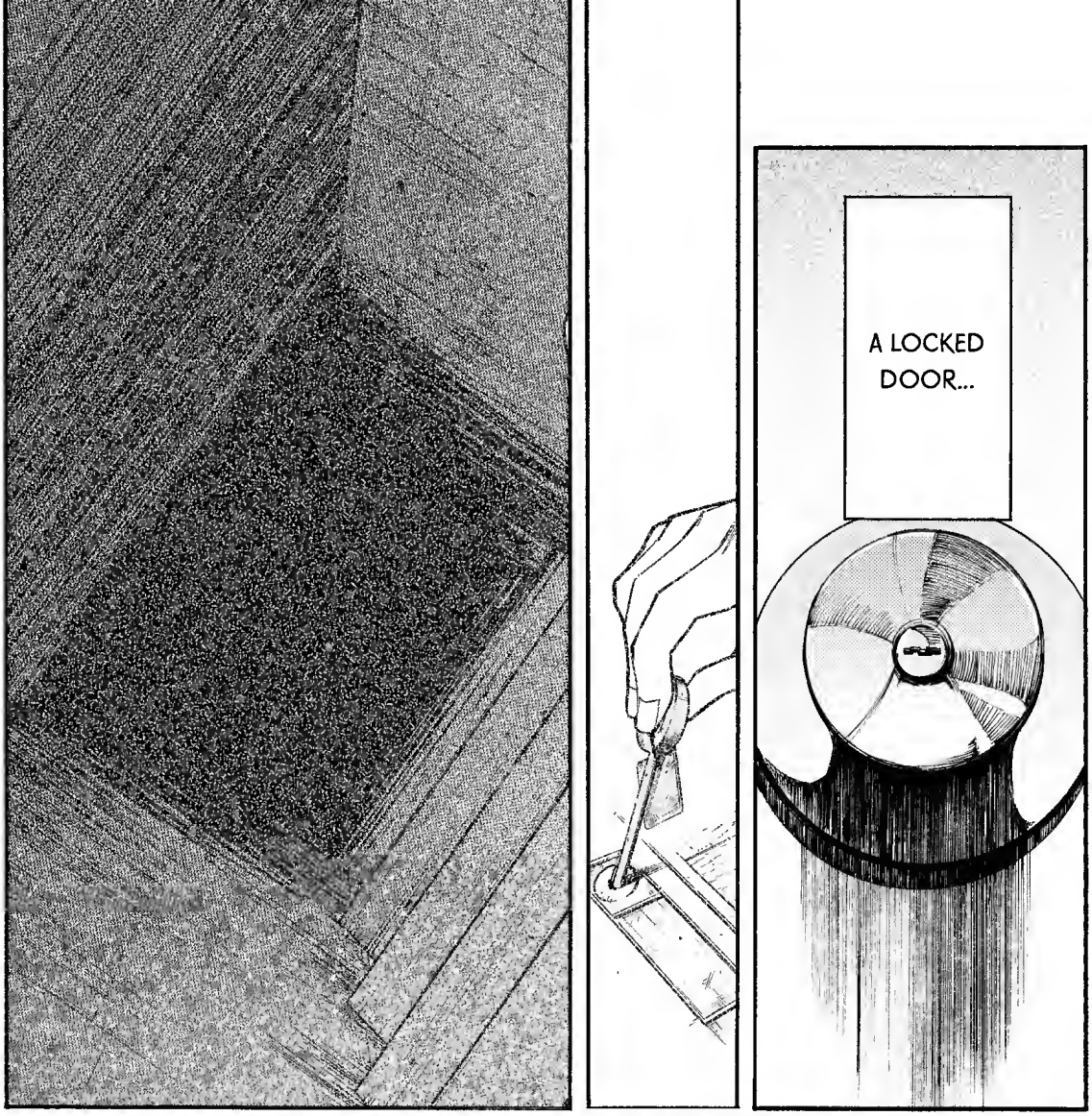
"IT'S A MEMENTO OF MY MOTHER."
OH, YEAH... I DID LET THAT SLIP AT THE BEACH.

ACTU-
ALLY
...
MY
MOTHER
IS ALIVE.
HUH?
BUT...
SHE'S
MEN-
TALLY
ILL...
SHE'S
NOT
LIKE
HOW
SHE
WAS
BE-
FORE.
NOW IT
SEEMS
SHE
DOESN'T
THINK
OF ME
AS HER
DAUGH-
TER.
THIS
IS...
SOME-
THING SHE
BOUGHT
FOR ME
BACK WHEN
SHE WAS
HERSELF.
SO IT'S...
SOMETHING
LIKE A
MEMENTO.

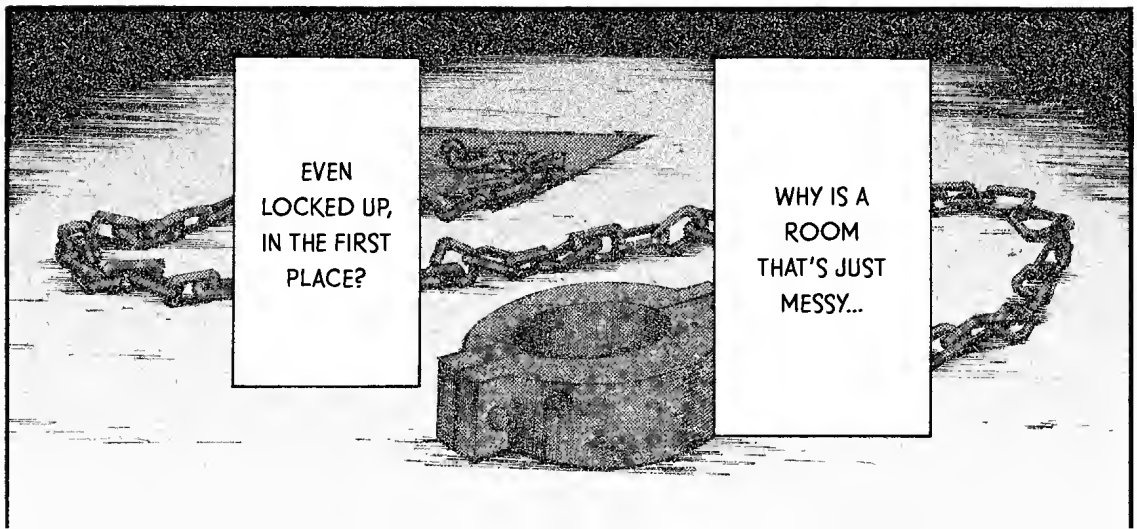
I SEE...

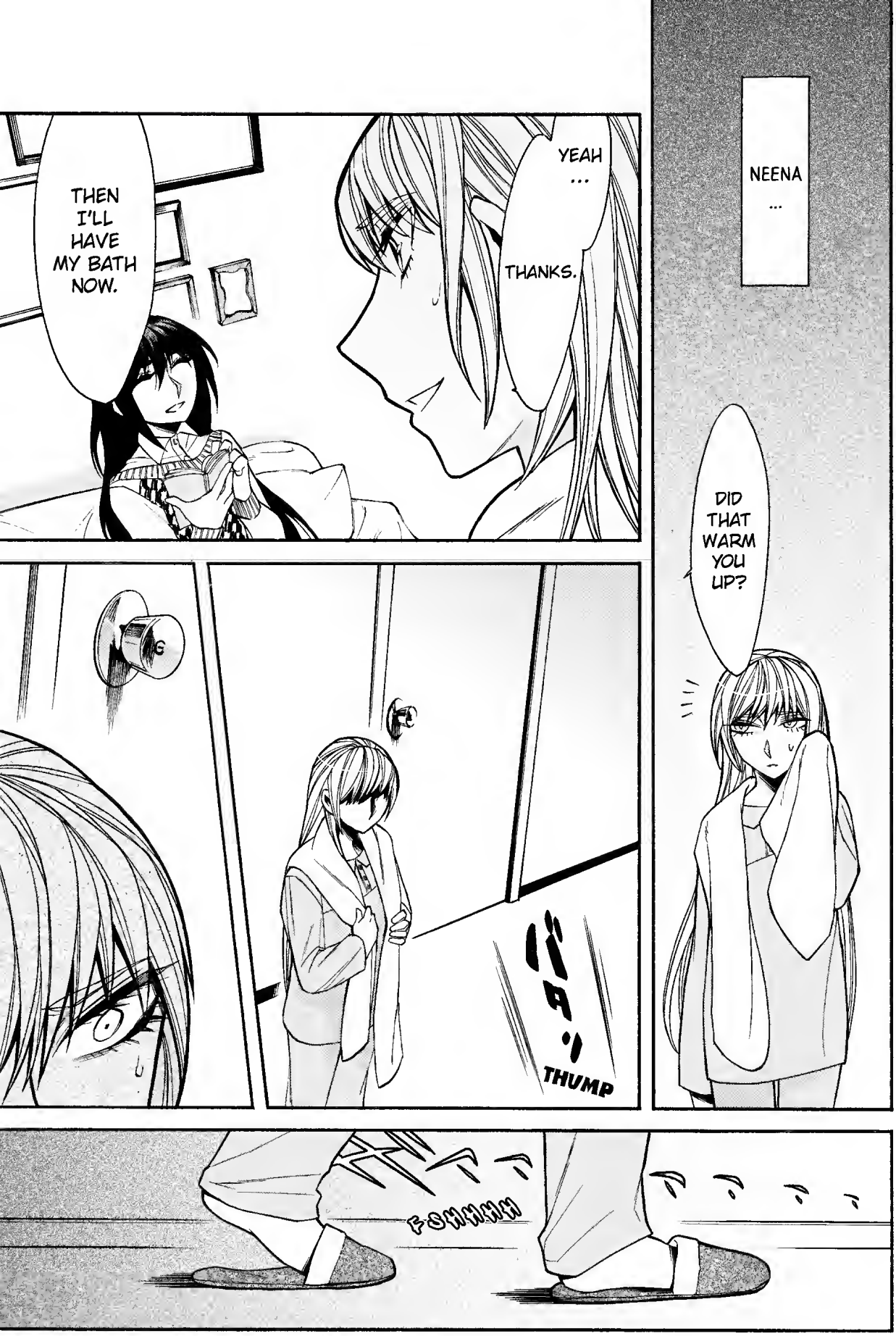
SORRY
TO BRING
ALL THIS
UP.
OH!
I DREW
A BATH,
SO YOU
CAN GO
FIRST,
IF YOU
LIKE!

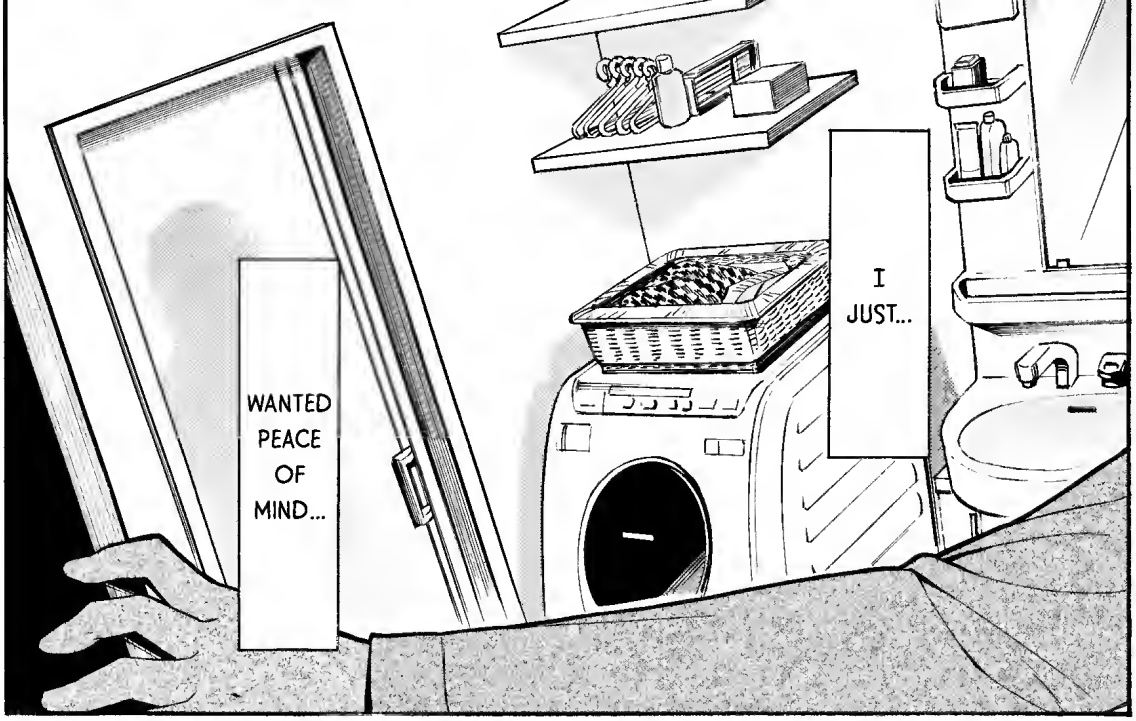
WHY AM I SO SCARED TO ASK YOU...
ABOUT KASANE FUCHI?
BUT...
APPARENTLY, SHE WAS A FAMOUS STAGE ACTRESS' ASSISTANT.
HER NAME IS NEENA TANZAWA.
IS WARM, JUST LIKE YOU.
AND THE APARTMENT YOU WELCOMED ME INTO ...
YOU'RE KIND AS ALWAYS ...
ESHHHH
NEENA ...


A LOCKED DOOR...

WHY DOES IT MAKE ME FEEL SO UNSETTLED?
WHY DOES IT REMIND ME OF THE BASEMENT MY MOTHER WAS IN?


EVEN LOCKED UP, IN THE FIRST PLACE?
WHY IS A ROOM THAT'S JUST MESSY...


NEENA
...
DID THAT WARM YOU UP?
YEAH ...
THANKS.
THEN I'LL HAVE MY BATH NOW.
THUMP
FOHHHH


I JUST...
WANTED PEACE OF MIND...

"IT'S BEST TO KEEP THINGS THAT ARE PRECIOUS TO YOU WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES."

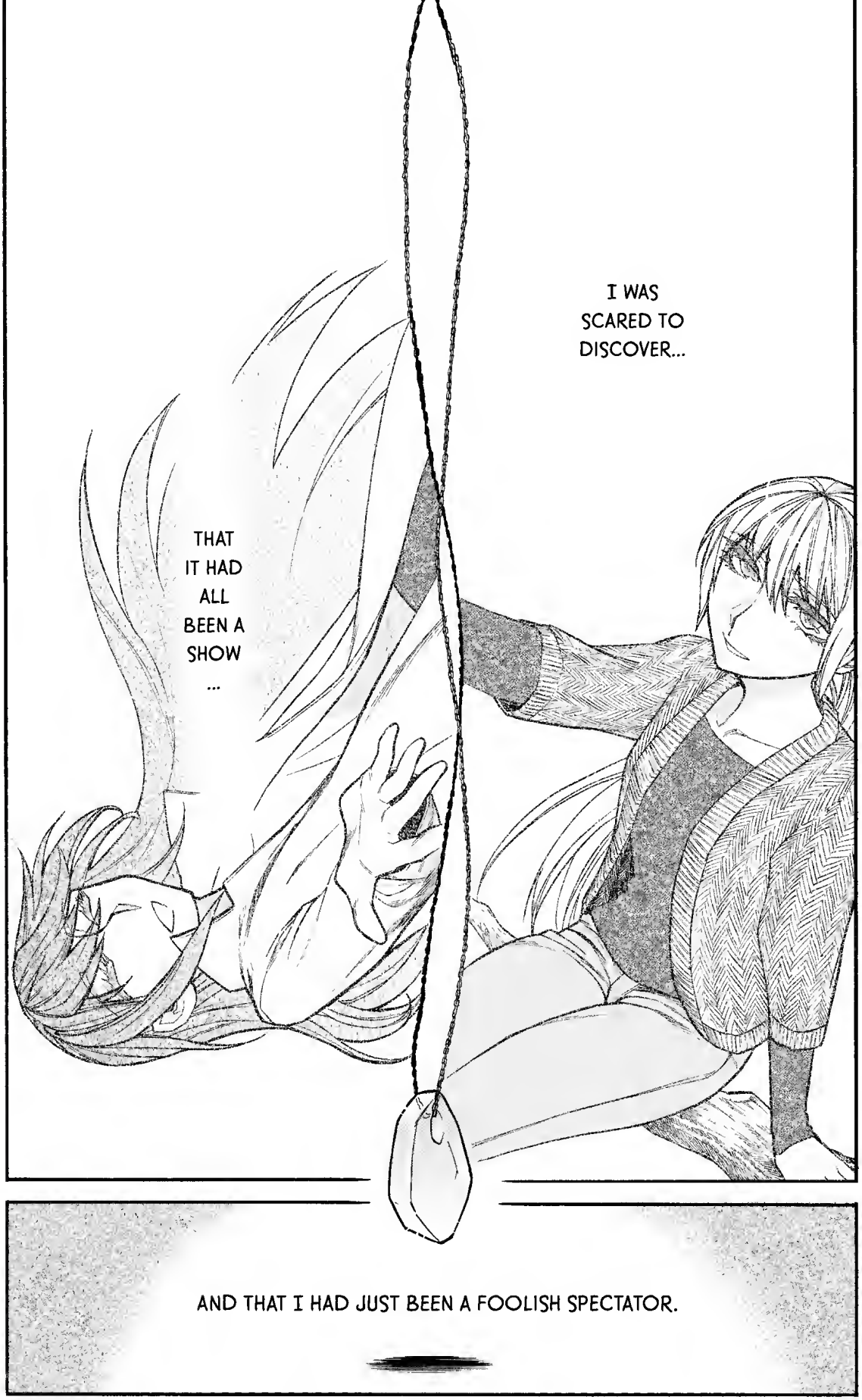
Hssssssss

SO WE COULD TALK TOGETHER AND GO OUT TOGETHER AS WE HAVE BEEN...

SO WE COULD SPEND TIME TOGETHER, SMILING TO EACH OTHER WITHOUT ANY PRETENSE ...

IT'S DARK ...
AND I CAN'T SE-
CREAK
HEY, NEENA...

EVEN THEN...
I STILL TRUST-ED YOU.

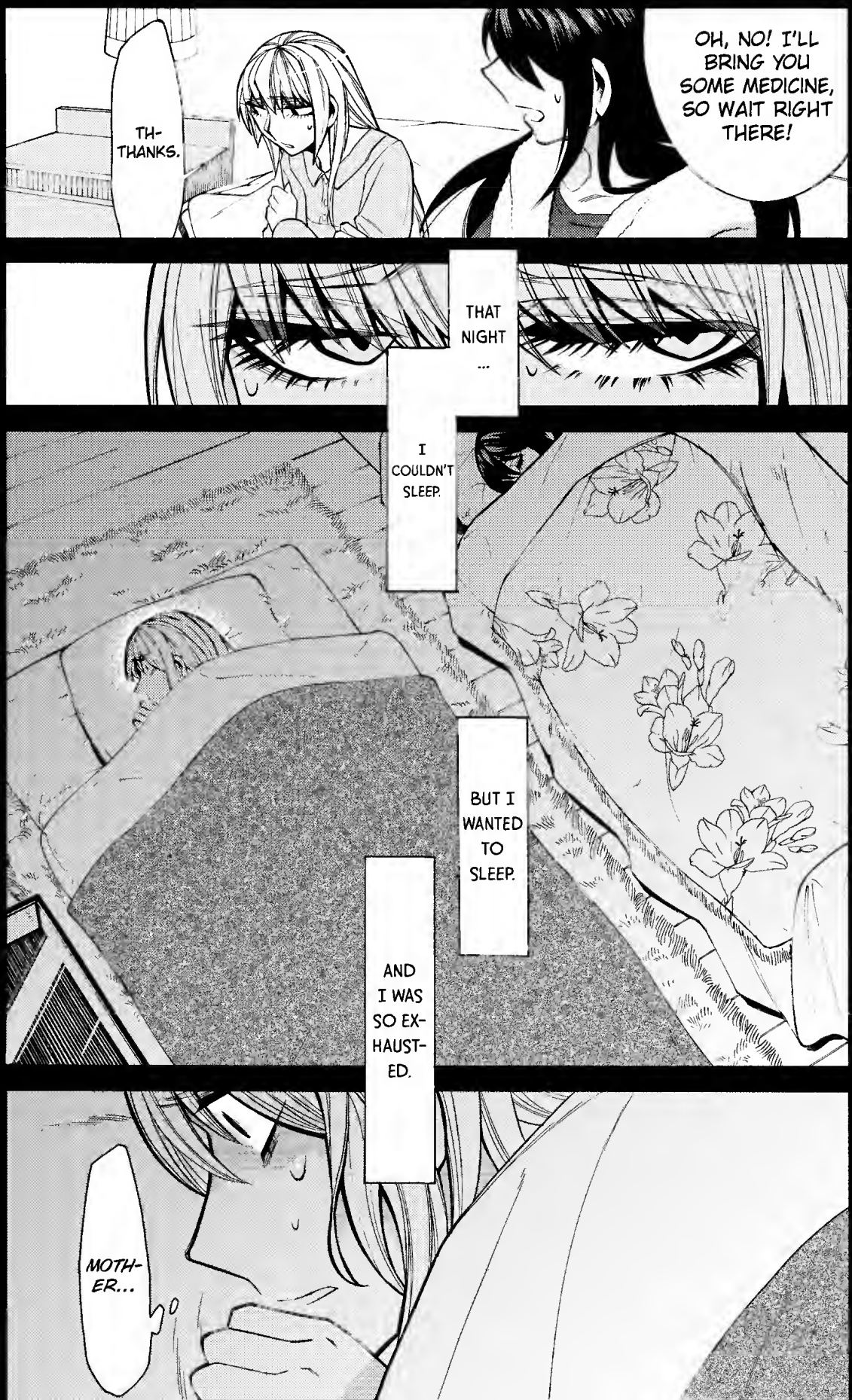


Chapter Thirty-Nine: the end

Chapter Forty: Liar

PHEW
...
カチャ
CLACK

FLINCH
WHAT'S WRONG, NOGIKU?
HMM?
YOU DON'T LOOK WELL.
OH ...
I FEEL CHILLY.
MAYBE I'VE CAUGHT A COLD.


TH-THANKS.
OH, NO! I'LL BRING YOU SOME MEDICINE, SO WAIT RIGHT THERE!
THAT NIGHT ...
I COULDN'T SLEEP.
BUT I WANTED TO SLEEP.
AND I WAS SO EX-HAUST-ED.
MOTH-ER...

INSIDE THAT LOCKED ROOM... WAS SLEEPING A WOMAN WHO LOOKED EXACTLY LIKE YOU.
BASED OFF THE INFORMATION AMAGASAKI GOT ME...
THAT MUST BE NEENA'S FORMER ASSISTANT, WHO'S IN A COMA RIGHT NOW... KASANE FUCHI.
THAT WOULD BE SHOCKING ENOUGH ON ITS OWN...
BUT...
THAT'S ALL.
BADUMP
BADUMP
NO.
YOU CAN'T THINK ABOUT IT.
BADUMP

A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN WHO'S AN INCREDIBLE ACTRESS...
AND THE UGLY WOMAN SHE KEEPS LOCKED UP...
BADUMP
NO ...
NO!
BADUMP
THE SIMILARITIES ALL FIT.
DON'T THINK ABOUT IT!
BADUMP
THE NEENA ...
I KNOW ...
NEENA ...
"DON'T OPEN THAT DOOR. IT'S REALLY MESSY IN THERE."
WHY... DID YOU LIE?

BADUMP
RIGHT NOW...
BADUMP
THE ONE SLEEP-ING BEHIND ME IS...
GOOD MORN-ING, NOGI-KU.

YOU WERE AL-READY AWAKE?
YAWN
ふぁ…
YEAH.
GOOD MORNING, NEENA.
I'M SORRY … THIS IS ALL I HAVE TO OFFER YOU.
OH, NO, IT'S DELI-CIOUS.

I THOUGHT FOR ONCE, I'D MET SOMEONE I COULD REALLY OPEN UP TO.
IT HURTS.
BUT RIGHT NOW, I'M *ACTING*... JUST LIKE I USED TO.

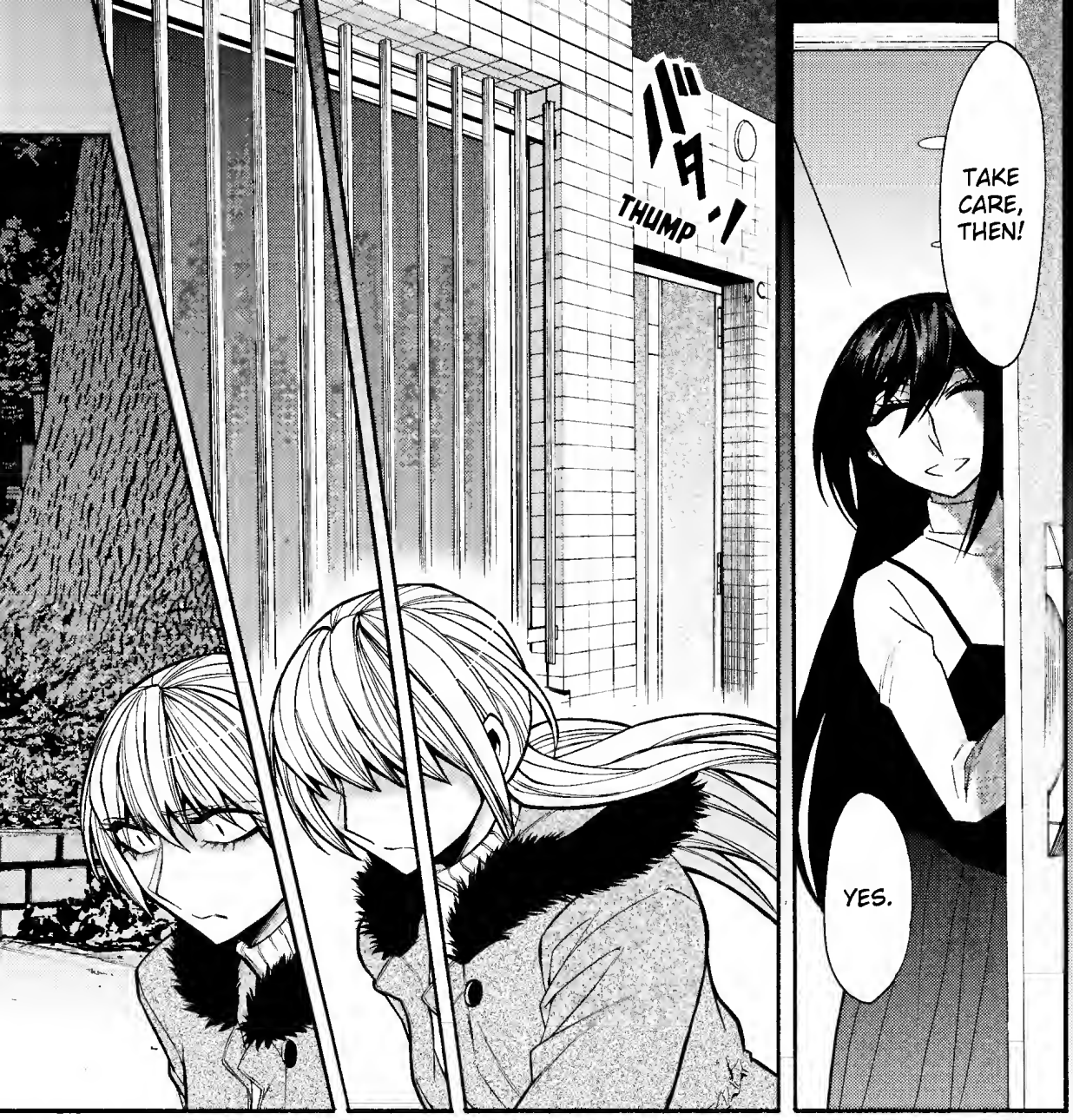
HEY...
YOU REALLY DON'T NEED A RIDE?
I'M FINE.
YOU'VE GOT WORK FIRST THING, DON'T YOU?
I HAVE SOME-WHERE TO BE TODAY, TOO.
I'M MEETING SOME-ONE, SO I WON'T BE IN ANY DANGER TONIGHT.
ALL RIGHT ...
SEE YOU.

HEY, NOGIKU ...
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE EVER HAD A FRIEND STAY OVER.
IT'S A LITTLE ... SAD TO SEE YOU GO.
YOU REALLY ...
RESEMBLE SOMEONE WHO WAS IMPORTANT TO ME— SOMEONE I'LL NEVER SEE AGAIN.
"THAT BEAUTIFUL FACE...
COMES TO LOOK MORE LIKE HER THE MORE YOU GROW."

BUT,
WELL,
YOU REALLY ONLY VAGUELY LOOK LIKE HER.
THAT'S... AN HONOR.
THEN...
I REMEMBERED A *CERTAIN SOMETHING* THAT MY FATHER ONCE SAID.
Oh,
AND...
NEENA,
I'LL ASK YOU ONE MORE TIME...

THERE REALLY IS SOME-THING ...
INSIDE THAT ROOM I HEARD THAT NOISE FROM, ISN'T THERE?
HEY ...
DON'T SAY THAT SCARY STUFF!
THERE'S NOTHING THERE.
REAL-LY?

REALLY.
WHAT'S WRONG?
LATE LAST NIGHT, I THOUGHT I HEARD SOME-THING AGAIN ...
BUT I'M SURE I WAS JUST HALF-ASLEEP.
I'M SORRY.
IT'S FINE.
YOU MUST HAVE HAD A FEVER.

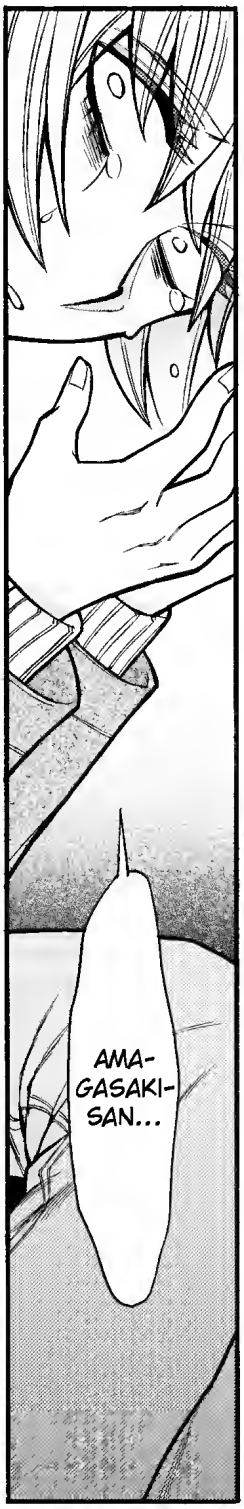

THUMP
TAKE CARE, THEN!
YES.

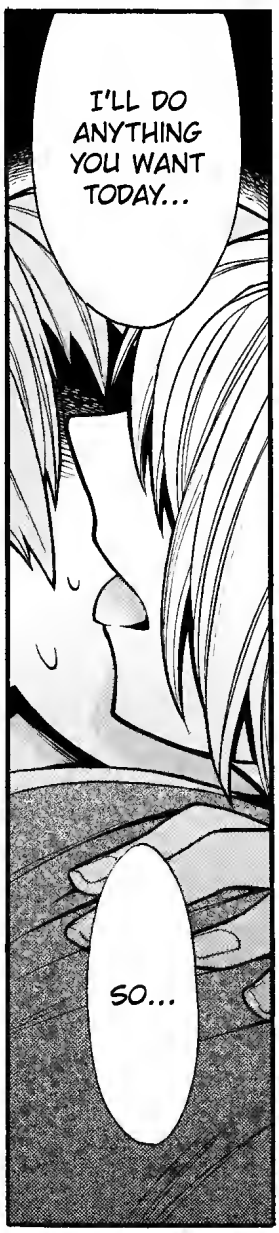
THAT LOOK ON HER FACE...
THE WAY HER EYES WERE FOCUSED ON ME, FOR A MOMENT, I EVEN FELT LIKE...
I WAS MISTAK-EN.

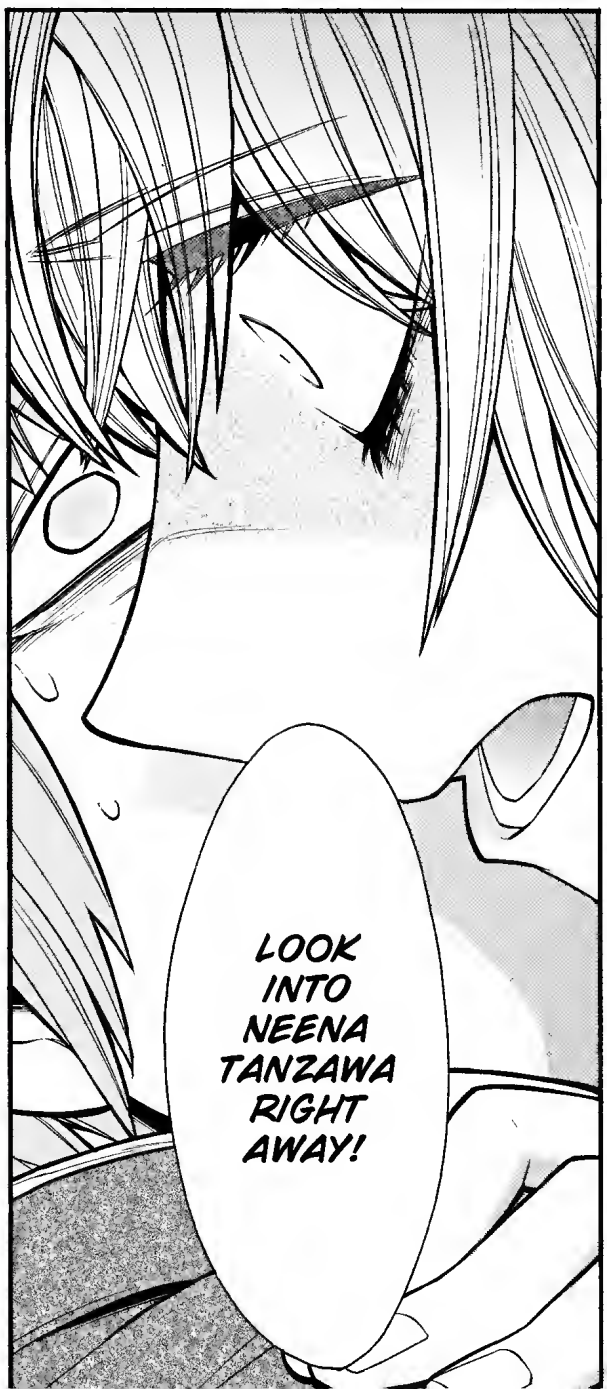
IT'S JUST LIKE MY FATHER SAID...
DON'T YOU LIE!
YOU TRIED TO RUN AWAY AGAIN, DIDN'T YOU?!
N-NO, I... I DIDN'T ...
GOOD GRIEF ...
YOU'RE EVEN BAD AT LYING.
EVEN WHEN ...
HER LIES WERE INCHES FROM BEING EXPOSED,
SUKEYO WAS NEVER RATTLED.

ON THE CONTRARY! SHE WOULD LOOK BACK AT YOU, STRAIGHT IN THE EYE...
AND GIVE YOU THE MOST SINCERE LOOK, WITH NOT ONE HINT OF DECEP-TION,
SMILING JUST LIKE MOTHER MARY.
ANYONE WOULD INSTANTLY BELIEVE SHE WAS TELLING THE TRUTH.
IT WAS JUST AS IF SHE WAS TURNING LIES INTO TRUTH!
IF YOU'RE GOING TO LIE ANYWAY... WHY COULDN'T YOU AT LEAST DO IT LIKE THAT...

SUKEYO ?!
SMILING CALMLY, A BEAUTIFUL LOOK IN HER EYES AS SHE LIES...
JUST AS FATHER SAID IZANA USED TO.
"SHE'S LIKE THE SECOND COMING OF SUKEYO FUCHI."
AH...
"REALLY."
IT ALL FITS...
YOU AND IZANA!
"THIS IS JUST WHAT YOU AND YOUR MOTHER LACKED."
AHHHH!
"I FEEL LIKE BY BECOMING SOMEONE ELSE,
I COMPLETE MYSELF."







Chapter Forty: the end

Chapter Forty-One: Yuuto Amagasaki

IF YOU'LL DO ANY-THING ...
THEN ...

JUST FOR TONIGHT... RIGHT?

NO.

I MEAN LIVING TOGETHER WITH ME FOR A WHILE.

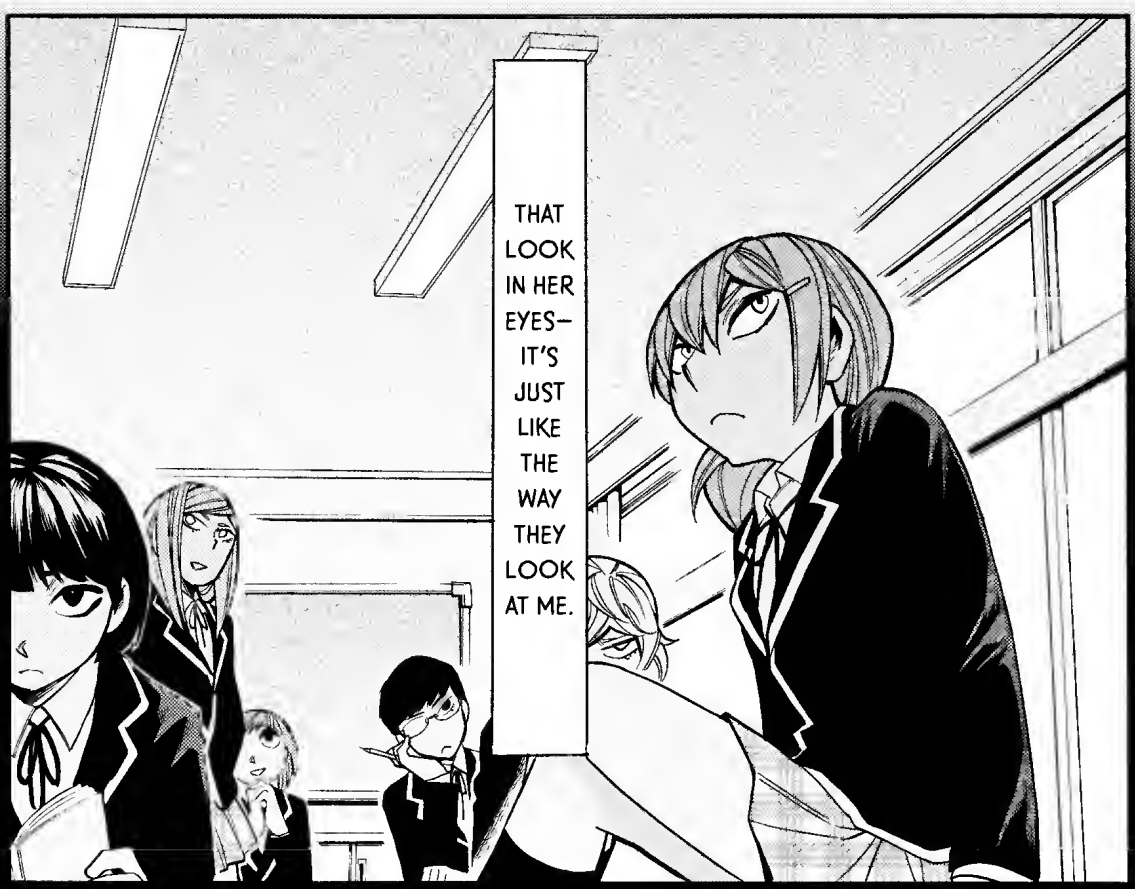
JERK

PLEASE COME TO MY HOME.

YOU WANT ME AS YOUR KEPT WOMAN, HUH?
YOU DON'T HAVE TO PUT IT THAT WAY...
I'M NOT GOING TO LOCK YOU IN OR ANY-THING.
I'LL GIVE YOU MY SPARE KEY.
IT'S INCON-VENIENT TO BE HOME-LESS ...
AND DANGEROUS, TOO, RIGHT?

AS MUCH AS YOU WANT.
I'LL INVESTIGATE NEENA TANZAWA...
IF YOU COME...
...
MY "KEPT WOMAN?"... I GUESS SHE WILL BE.
I'VE COME TO WANT HER CLOSE AT HAND.
NO, MOST OF ALL...
YOUTHFUL BODY,
HER BEAUTIFUL FACE,

THOSE EYES.

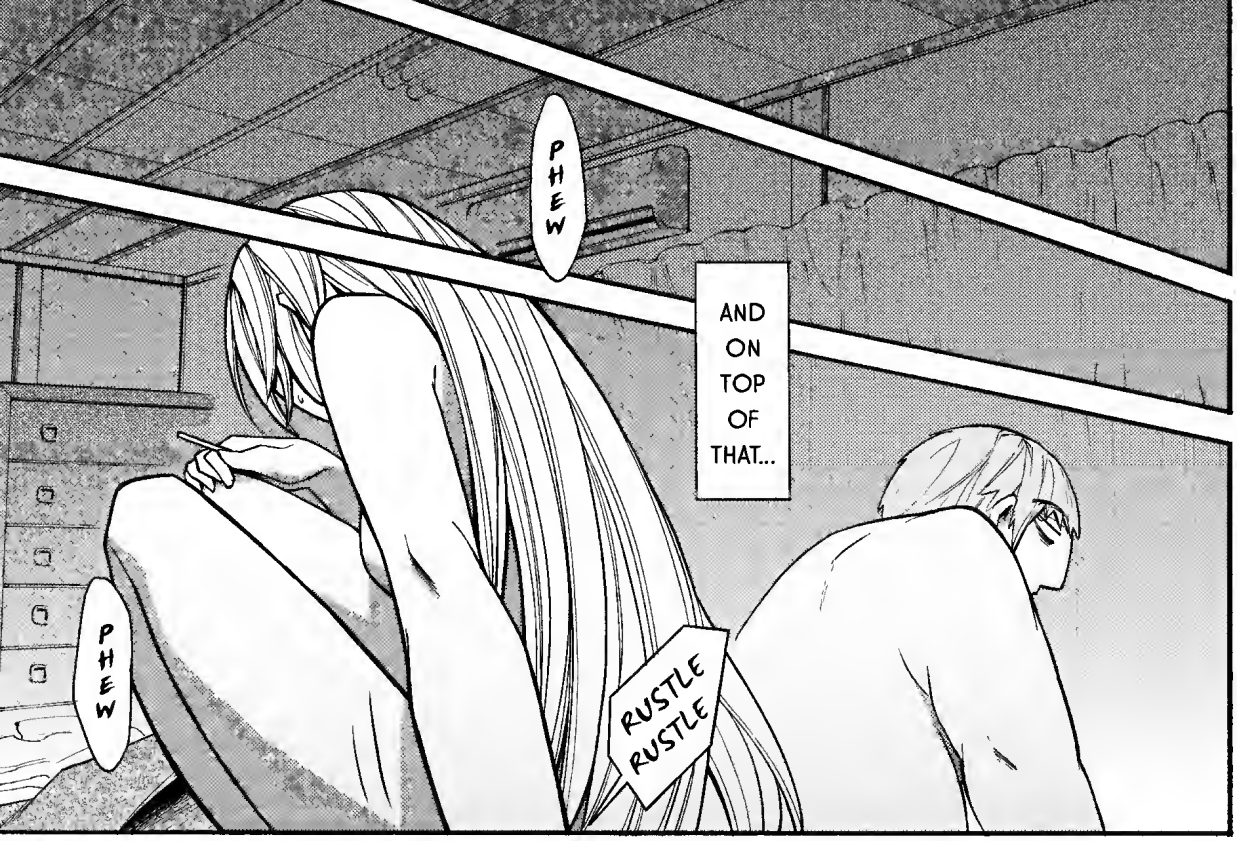

THAT LOOK IN HER EYES— IT'S JUST LIKE THE WAY THEY LOOK AT ME.

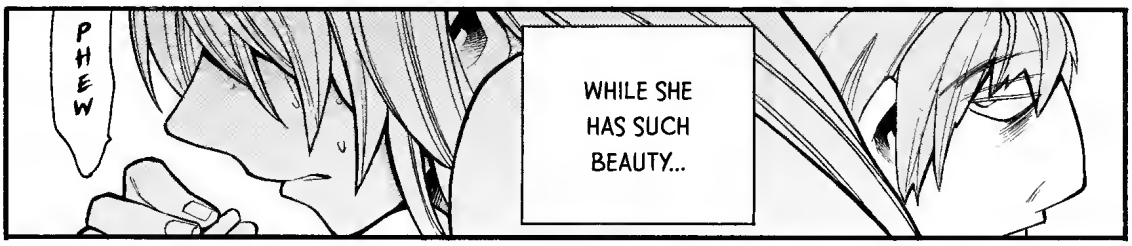
HE'S SOO CREEPY.
WHY DO WE HAVE TO LOOK AT THAT GROSS THING ALL DAY LONG?
THEY NEED TO BLUR HIS FACE OUT!
AHA HA HA HA HA!
HEY! WE'RE TALKING ABOUT YOU, AMAGA-SAKI!
KYA HA HA HA HA HA HA!
GET LOST, FOR REAL!
AHA HA HA HA HA!

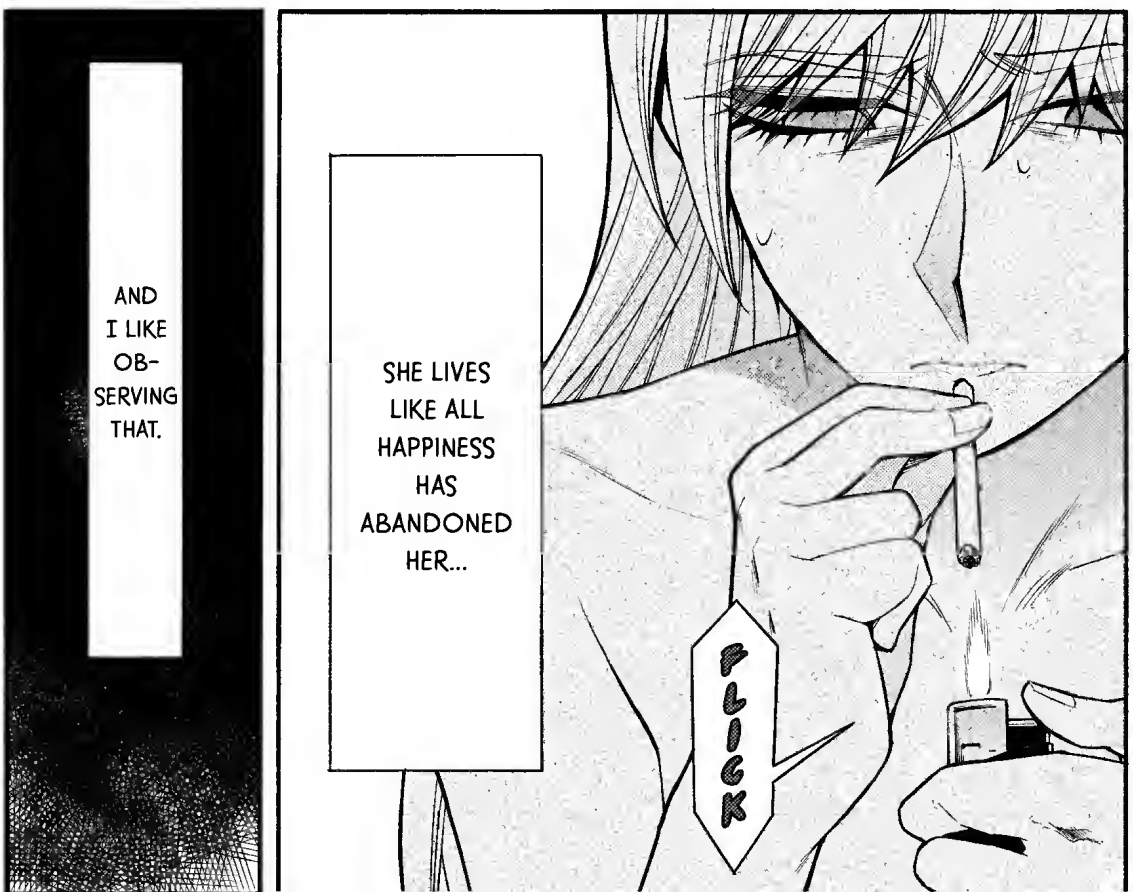
I WANT TO BREAK THEM.
I WANT TO PUNCH THEM DOWN ...
KILL THEM...
AND THROW THEM AWAY.
RAPE THEM...
BUT I CAN'T DO THAT.
I CAN'T EVEN COMPLAIN ABOUT IT.
ATTENDANCE
IF ANYTHING HAPPENS, I'M THE ONE WHO WILL LOSE MY JOB.

I'VE BEEN OBSESSED WITH MY FANTASIES OF BREAKING THEM ALL.
OUTSIDE OF WORK HOURS...
THEN ONE DAY...
I MET HER.

SHE'S JUST LIKE THEM,
WITH THAT LOOK OF DISDAIN AND HATRED FOR ME.
BUT UNLIKE THEM...
THIS ONE *WILL* BREAK IN MY HANDS.
GLARE
SHIVER


PHEW
AND ON TOP OF THAT...
PHEW
RUSTLE RUSTLE


PHEW
WHILE SHE HAS SUCH BEAUTY...


AND I LIKE OB-SERVING THAT.
SHE LIVES LIKE ALL HAPPINESS HAS ABANDONED HER...
FLICK

SINCE THEN,
I'VE DREAMED EVERY NIGHT...
OF THE NEENA I KNOW...
WARM,
AND STRONG.
KIND,

CLACK
WAIT!
NEE-
NA
...?

NOGIKU-SAN.
TWITCH

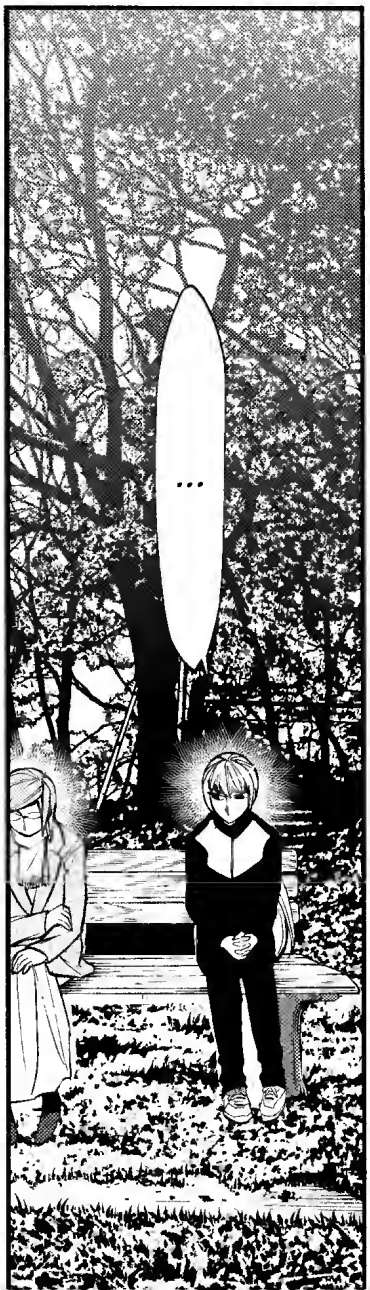
SLEEPING OUT HERE AGAIN ...
YOU'LL CATCH A COLD.
WHEN DID YOU COME BACK?
JUST NOW.
HEY... AMAGA-SAKI-SAN.
HOW MANY DAYS IS THIS GOING TO TAKE?
YOU STILL DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT NEENA TANZAWA?!
SHE SMELLS LIKE BOOZE.
ACTUALLY, I HAVE SOMETHING TO TELL YOU ABOUT THAT.

I'VE LEARNED MOST OF WHAT THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT HER ACTING CAREER.
SINCE QUITE A BIT OF IT IS PUBLIC.
AFTER SHE DROPPED OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL, SHE STARTED ACTING, BUT SHE JUST COULDN'T GET A BREAK.
SHE MUST HAVE BEEN SICK, AS THERE WERE TIMES WHEN SHE PASSED OUT DURING REHEARSAL.

BUT ONCE SHE REACHED ADULT-HOOD ...
SHE SUDDENLY BEGAN TO DIS-TINGUISH HERSELF,
AND BEGAN TO GAIN POPULARITY AS AN ACTRESS.
IT WAS ALSO AT THIS TIME THAT KASANE FUCHI BECAME HER ASSISTANT.
BUT...

I JUST COULDN'T GET MY HANDS ON THAT THING YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO SEE.
NEENA TANZAWA'S FAMILY MIGHT HAVE IT...
BUT IF I APPROACH THEM, THEY'RE SURE TO SEE ME AS SUSPICIOUS.
IF YOU WANT TO MAKE SURE OF *THAT*...
THEN FROM THIS POINT ON, PLEASE GO YOURSELF.
I FOUND OUT THAT NEENA TANZAWA'S MOTHER ALWAYS GOES FOR WALKS AT THE SAME TIME, ON THE SAME ROUTE.
TALKING TO HER THEN WOULD SEEM MORE NATURAL THAN MAKING DIRECT CONTACT WITH HER FAMILY.

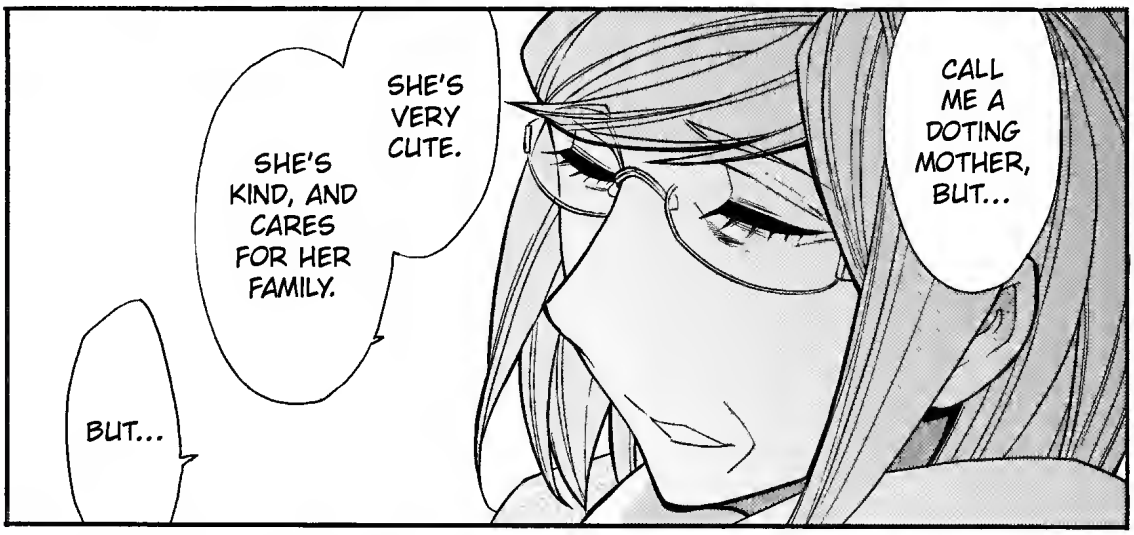
MIND IF I SIT WITH YOU?


...

G-GO AHEAD ...

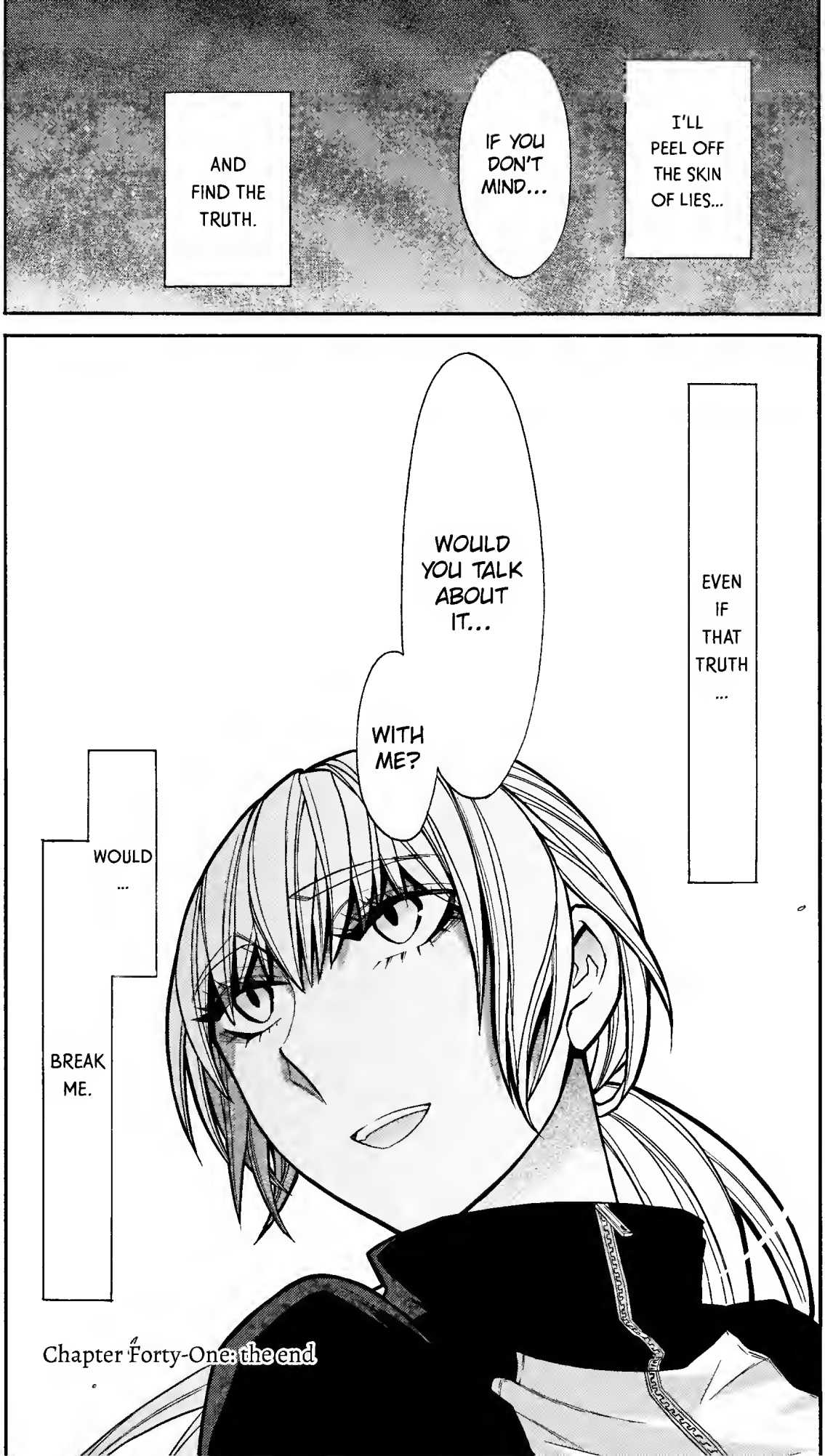
UM... DID YOU NEED SOME-THING?
N-NO.
UM...
YOU ALWAYS GO FOR WALKS HERE, DON'T YOU?
I OFTEN SEE YOU HERE WHEN I'M OUT RUNNING.
THEY LOOK A LOT ALIKE.
OH NO... IT'S JUST A HOBBY.
OH ... IT'S GREAT THAT YOU'RE OUT HERE, EVEN IN THE COLD.
...

IT'S JUST AS IF I'M TALKING TO MY DAUGHTER.
...
YOU HAVE A DAUGHTER?
YES.
SHE'S JUST ABOUT YOUR AGE.


CALL ME A DOTING MOTHER, BUT...
SHE'S VERY CUTE.
SHE'S KIND, AND CARES FOR HER FAMILY.
BUT...

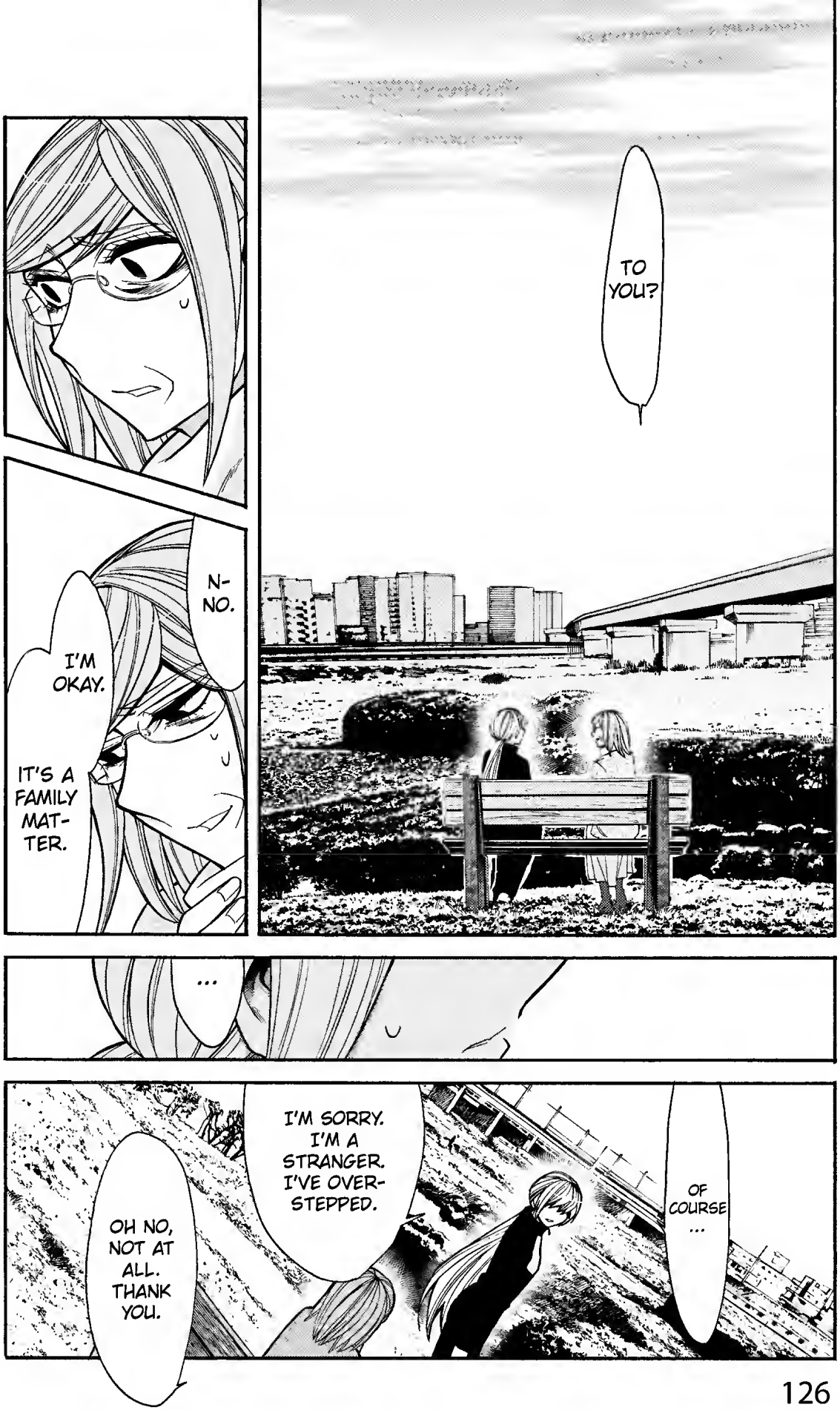
...
A-ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

IT'S OKAY ...
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, PLEASE.
I'M SORRY ...
BEING LIKE THIS, IN FRONT OF...
A TOTAL STRANG-ER...
THANK YOU...
I FEEL LIKE THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE SPOKEN TO A PERSON IN A LONG TIME.
BECAUSE RIGHT NOW... NOBODY IS LISTENING TO ME...
UM...



Chapter Forty-One: the end

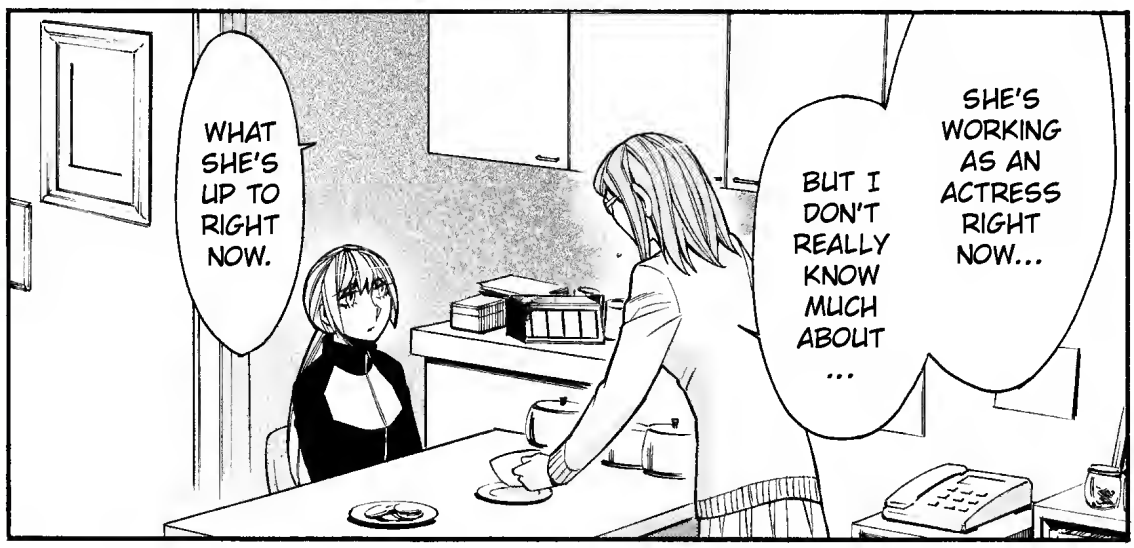
Chapter Forty-Two: Hellfire


TO YOU?
N-NO.
I'M OKAY.
IT'S A FAMILY MAT-TER.
...
OF COURSE ...
I'M SORRY. I'M A STRANGER. I'VE OVER-STEPPED.
OH NO, NOT AT ALL. THANK YOU.

SEE YOU ...
WAIT!

MY DAUGHTER...
ASPIRED TO BE AN ACTRESS.
"ASPIRED?"

OH...
NO...


SHE'S WORKING AS AN ACTRESS RIGHT NOW...
BUT I DON'T REALLY KNOW MUCH ABOUT ...
WHAT SHE'S UP TO RIGHT NOW.

"NOW IT SEEMS SHE DOESN'T THINK OF ME AS HER DAUGHTER."
WOULD YOU MIND... IF I ASKED MORE ABOUT YOUR DAUGHTER?
ACTUALLY, I'M INTERESTED IN THEATER, TOO.
OH, MY!
DO YOU MEAN NOT WATCHING THEATER, BUT ACTING?
YOU'RE SO PRETTY, I'M SURE YOU'D REALLY SHINE ON STAGE.
NO ... NOT AT ALL.
ANYWAY...

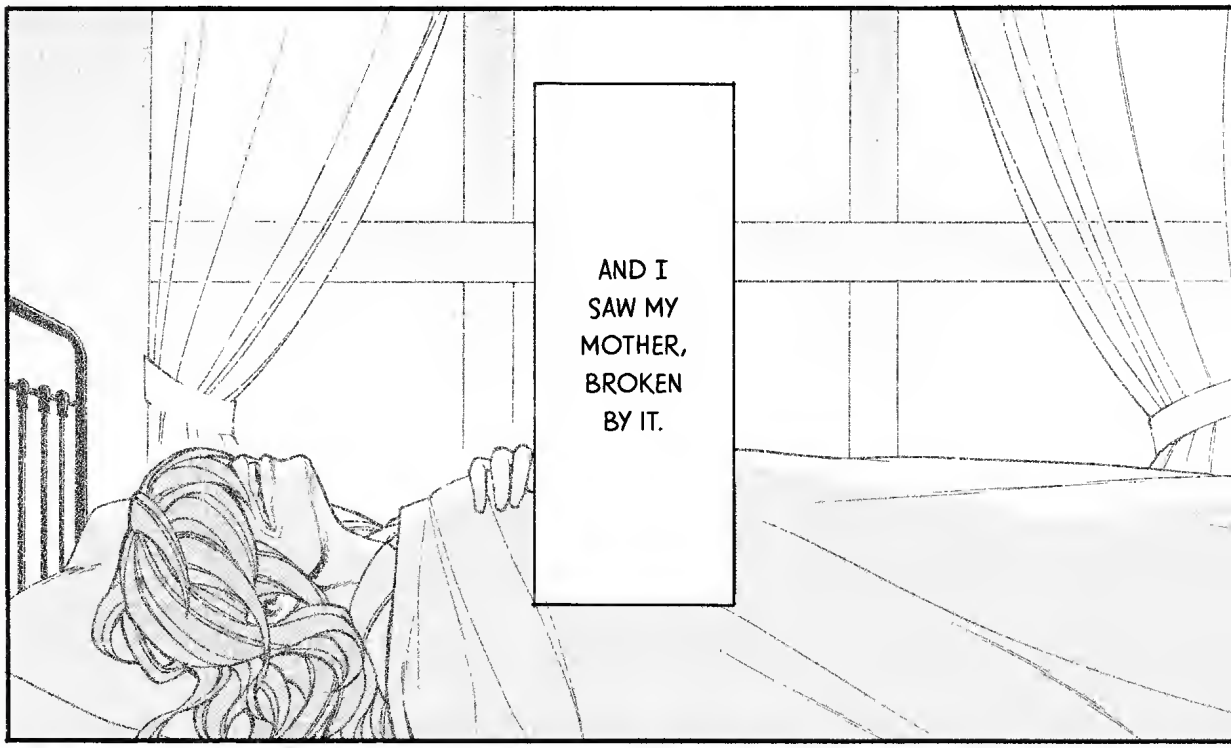
I'D... LIKE TO SEE ...
YOUR DAUGHTER ON STAGE.
...
ALL I'VE GOT HERE ARE RECORD-INGS OF HER FROM LONG AGO.
SO SHE MIGHT NOT BE AS POLISHED IN THESE AS SHE IS NOW.

THE DIFFERENCES WERE CLEAR. SO CLEAR, I WAS CERTAIN.

THE PERSON THAT I KNOW... IS NOT NEENA TAN-ZAWA.

THIS WOMAN'S INTUITION IS RIGHT,
BUT NO ONE ELSE BELIEVES HER...
BECAUSE NO ONE COULD IMAGINE THAT STEALING SOMEONE'S FACE...
IS ACTUALLY POSSIBLE.

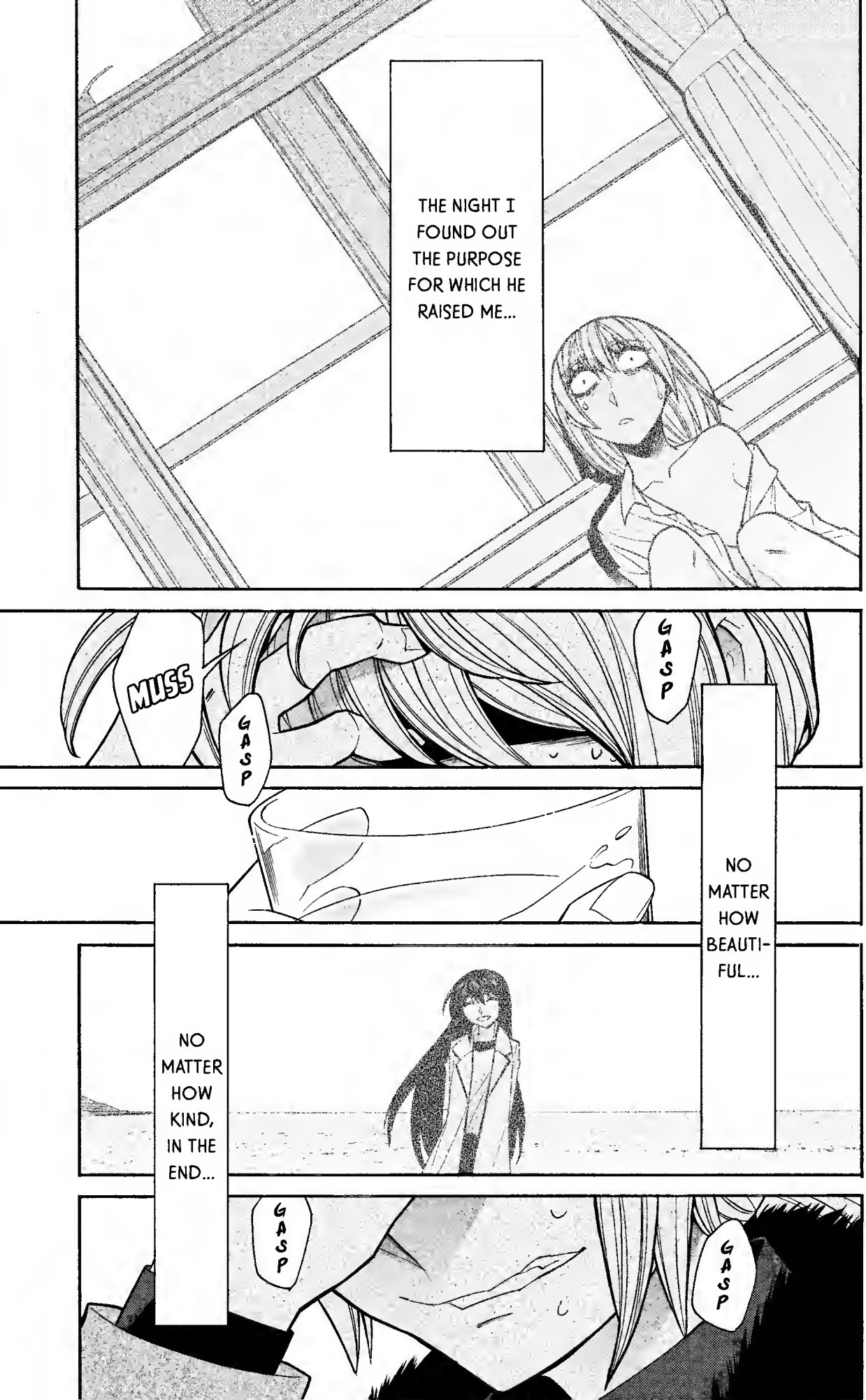
BUT I SAW IT.


AND I SAW MY MOTHER, BROKEN BY IT.

AND LIKE MY MOTHER, THIS WOMAN...
制限高 2.1M

YOU'RE PRETTY LATE.
キュッ
SQUEAK
FSHHH

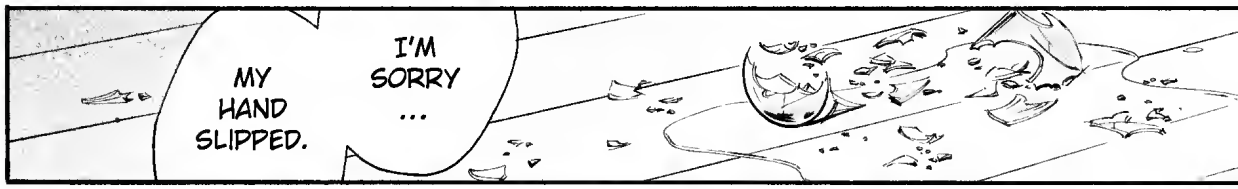
GULP
YES.
MY FA-THER, WHO WAS SO KIND TO ME,
EVER SINCE I WAS LITTLE ...
THIS FEELS LIKE IT DID BACK THEN.


THE NIGHT I FOUND OUT THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH HE RAISED ME...
GASP
MUSS
GASP
NO MATTER HOW BEAUTI-FUL...
NO MATTER HOW KIND, IN THE END...
GASP
GASP

IT'S
FAKE.
SMASH

WAS A WOMAN WITH AN ALMOST INHUMAN LOOK ON HER FACE.

GASP


I'M SORRY ...
MY HAND SLIPPED.

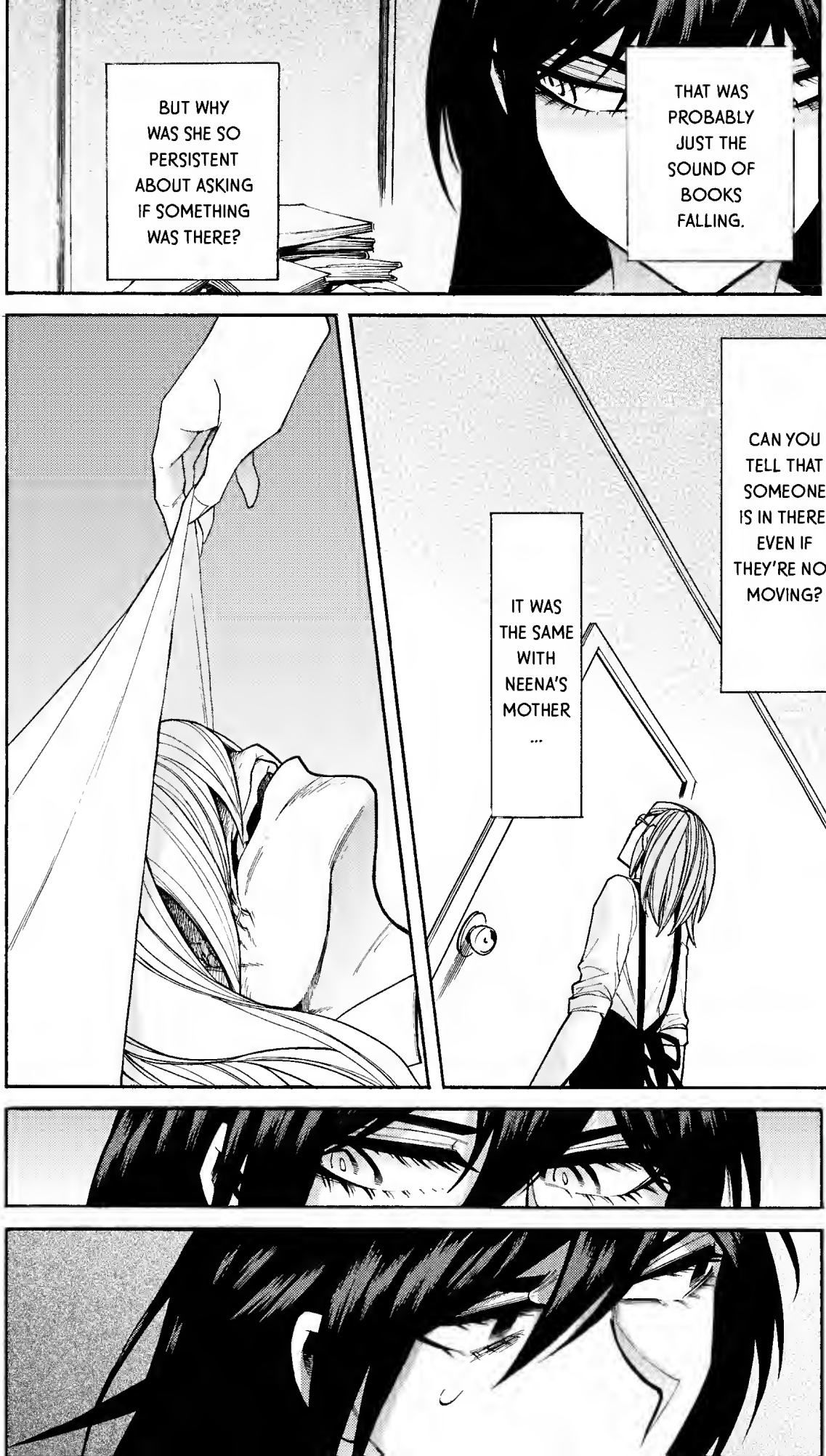
JUST WHAT KIND OF FIRE IS SEETHING INSIDE HER?

...
OH, IT'S FINE. I HAVE OTHERS.

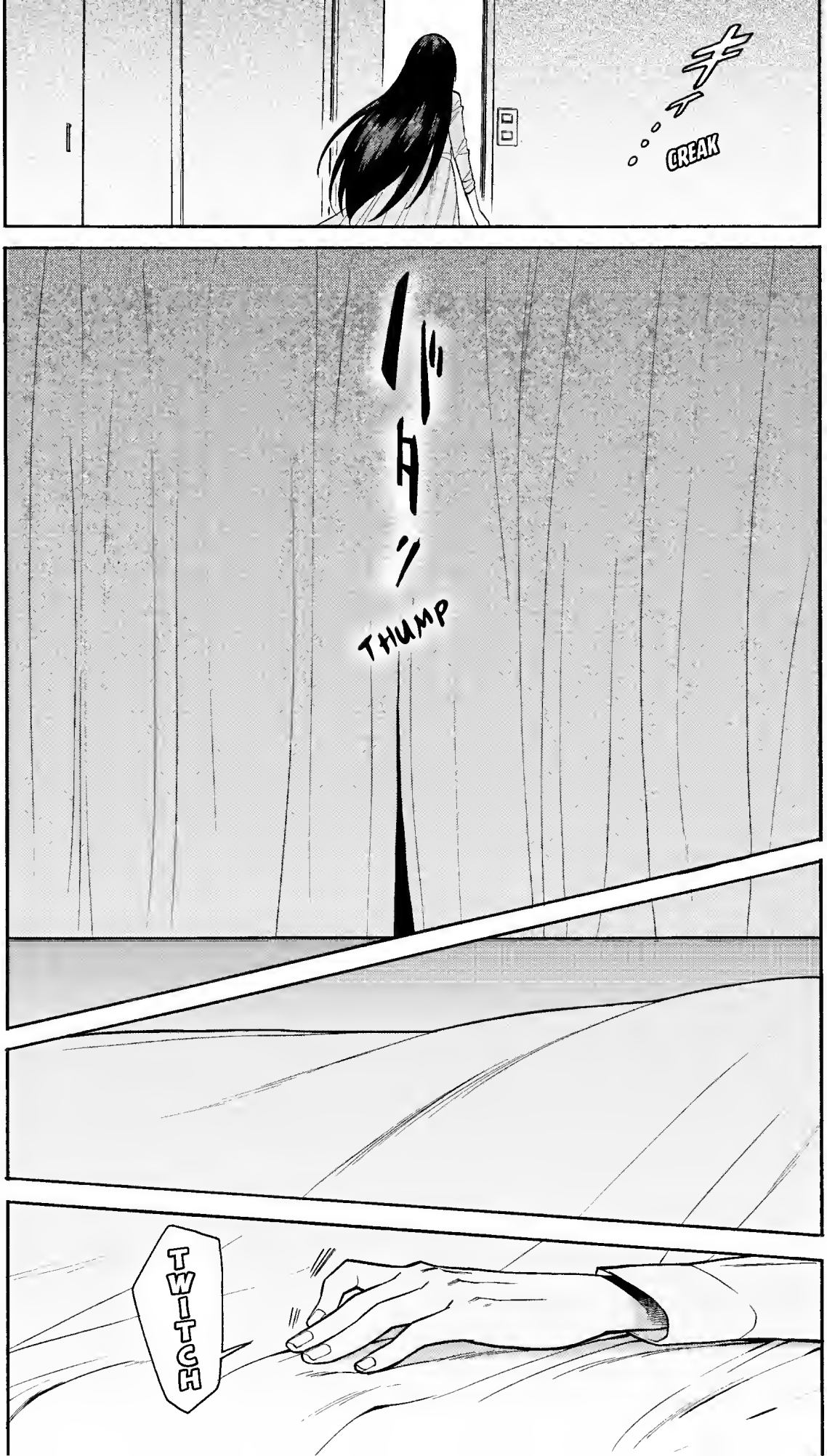
I'LL CLEAN IT UP.
THE SHIVER IN HER VOICE ...

"THERE REALLY IS SOMETHING...
INSIDE THAT ROOM I HEARD THAT NOISE FROM, ISN'T THERE?"

A NOISE ...


BUT WHY WAS SHE SO PERSISTENT ABOUT ASKING IF SOMETHING WAS THERE?
THAT WAS PROBABLY JUST THE SOUND OF BOOKS FALLING.
CAN YOU TELL THAT SOMEONE IS IN THERE, EVEN IF THEY'RE NOT MOVING?
IT WAS THE SAME WITH NEENA'S MOTHER ...

YOU'RE A LIFE-LESS DOLL...
YOU DON'T EVEN EXIST.
THAT'S WHAT YOU HAVE TO BE.



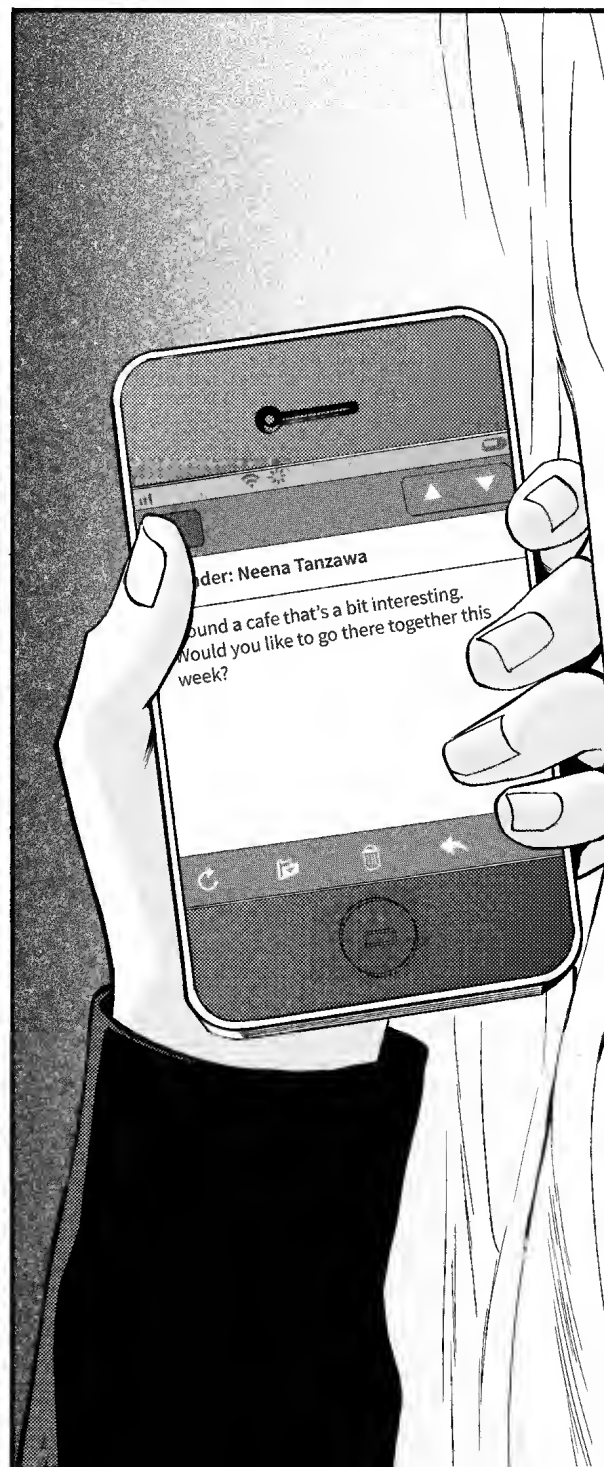
Chapter Forty-Two: the end

KASANE

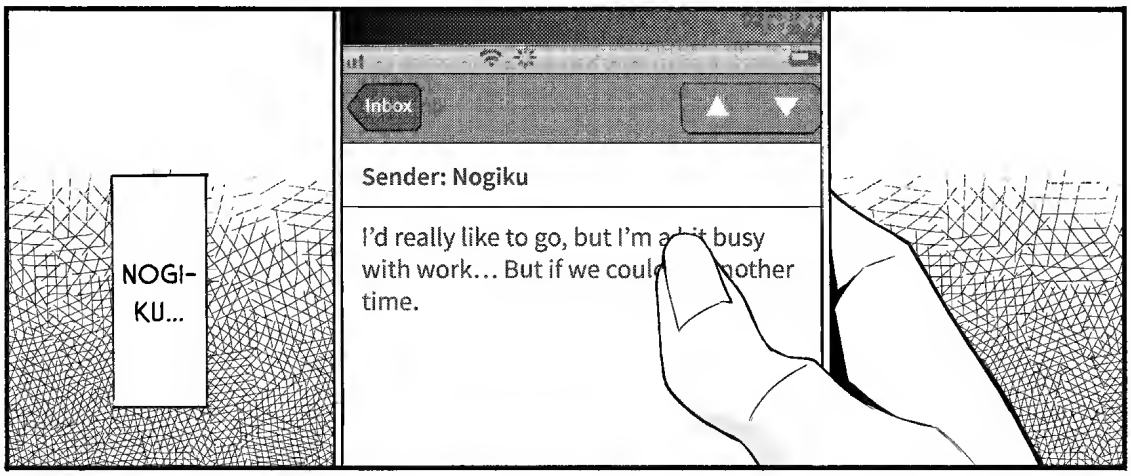
SONG TIME

Chapter Forty-Three: Retracing the Past

...

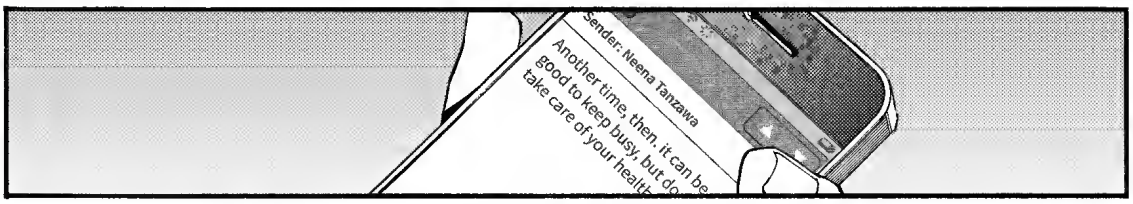

der: Neena Tanzawa
ound a cafe that's a bit interesting.
Would you like to go there together this
week?

BZZ

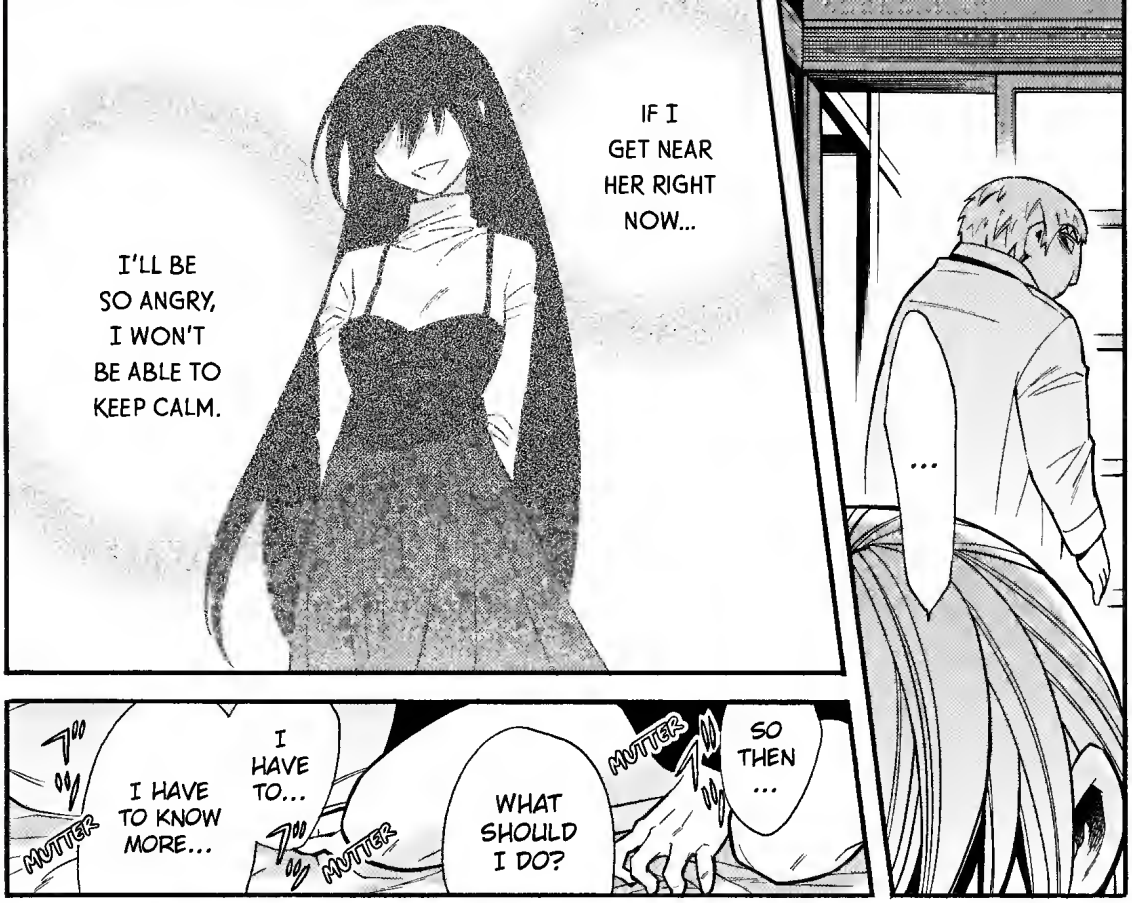

NOGI-KU...
Inbox
Sender: Nogiku
I'd really like to go, but I'm a bit busy with work... But if we could, another time.

I HAVEN'T SEEN HER SINCE THAT DAY SHE STAYED AT MY PLACE.
IT'S ALMOST TIME FOR MY NEXT SHOW, SO I'VE BEEN BUSIER WITH WORK, AND THAT'S PART OF IT, BUT...
OR...
IS THERE SOME OTHER REASON SHE DOESN'T WANT TO SEE ME?

I'LL INVITE HER OUT AGAIN SOME-TIME LATER.
NO... I CAN'T BE SO SUSPICIOUS OF HER.
...


Sender: Neena Tanzawa
Another time, then. it can be
good to keep busy, but do
take care of your health

SLAM
NO-GIKU-SAN.
PLEASE DON'T TAKE IT OUT ON INANIMATE OBJECTS SO MUCH.
THIS PLACE ISN'T THAT STURDY.
JERK


IF I GET NEAR HER RIGHT NOW...
I'LL BE SO ANGRY, I WON'T BE ABLE TO KEEP CALM.
...
SO THEN ...
MUTTER
WHAT SHOULD I DO?
I HAVE TO...
MUTTER
I HAVE TO KNOW MORE...
MUTTER

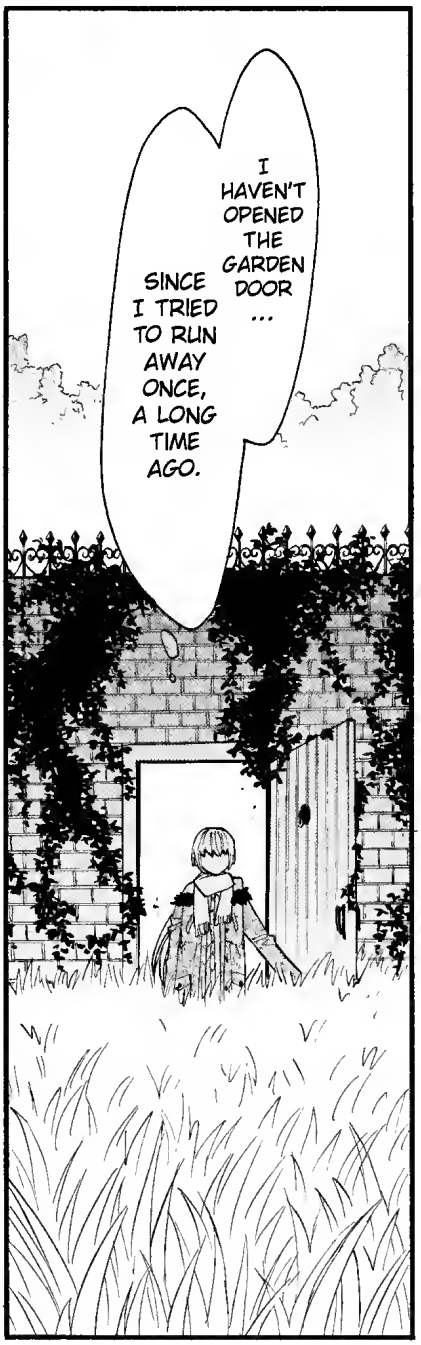
ESPE-CIALLY ...

ABOUT "EXCHANGING FACES WITH A KISS."
THAT PHENOME-NON...NO, ABILITY? SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE.
SO HOW COULD BOTH MOTHER AND CHILD BE ABLE TO DO IT?

...
THAT HATEFUL PLACE. I DON'T EVEN WANT TO REMEMBER IT.
MUTTER
MUTTER
MUTTER
MUTTER
I HAVE TO GO BACK *THERE* AGAIN, AFTER ALL.
SOMETHING THAT WILL TELL ME THE SECRET OF THE KISS.
THE PLACE I WAS BORN...
IN THE MANSION WHERE MY MOTHER AND IZANA LIVED,
I'M SURE THERE'S SOME-THING STILL THERE ...

WHAT?
WHO ON EARTH DID THIS?
IT COULDN'T BE...HAS SOMEONE GONE INTO THE MANSION?
BUT I HAVEN'T SEEN THAT IN THE NEWS, YET...
HAVE THEY FOUND FATHER?
...
WHO-EVER THEY WERE ...
IF IT'S LOCKED FROM THE OUTSIDE, THERE CAN'T BE ANYONE INSIDE.
THEN ...

ガチャ
CHACK

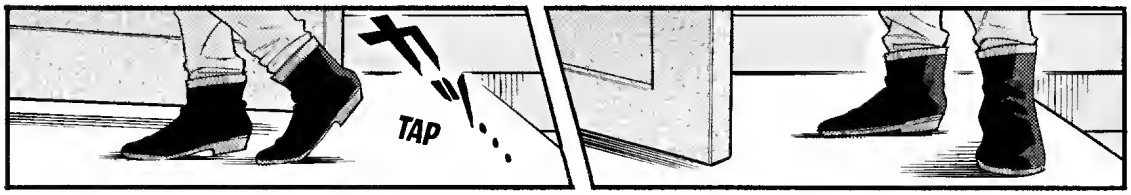

I HAVEN'T OPENED THE GARDEN DOOR ...
SINCE I TRIED TO RUN AWAY ONCE, A LONG TIME AGO.

IF SOMEONE WENT INSIDE AND THEN LOCKED THE DOOR WITHOUT REPORTING THINGS TO THE POLICE,
THEN THEY MAY HAVE BEEN A THIEF.

IT'S LOCKED ...
CREAK

UGH!
IT REEKS.

SHIVER
FATHER ...
THE SMELL OF DEATH ...

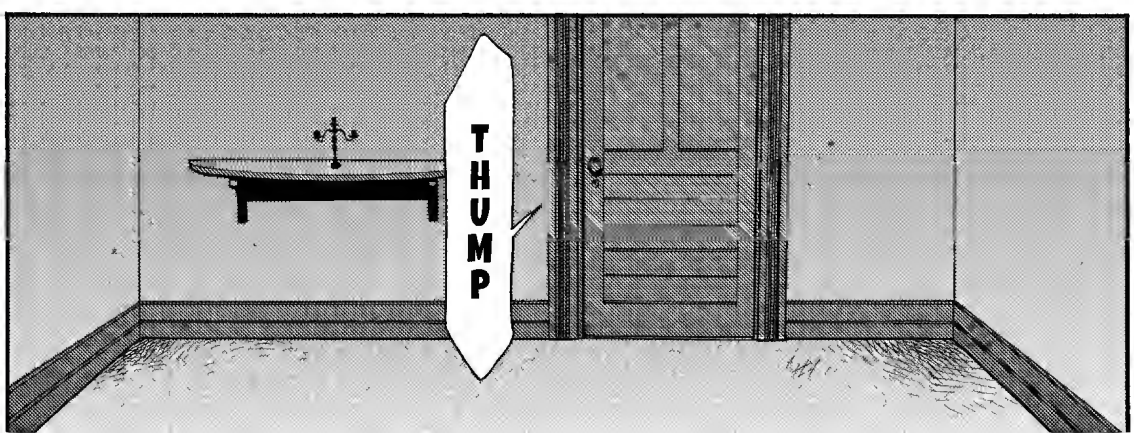

TAP

WHAT I NEED TO LOOK FOR ARE TRACES OF IZANA.
THOUGH SAYING THAT, SHE'S LEFT BEHIND ... TONS OF CLOTHES AND SHOES.
AGH. I HATE THIS.

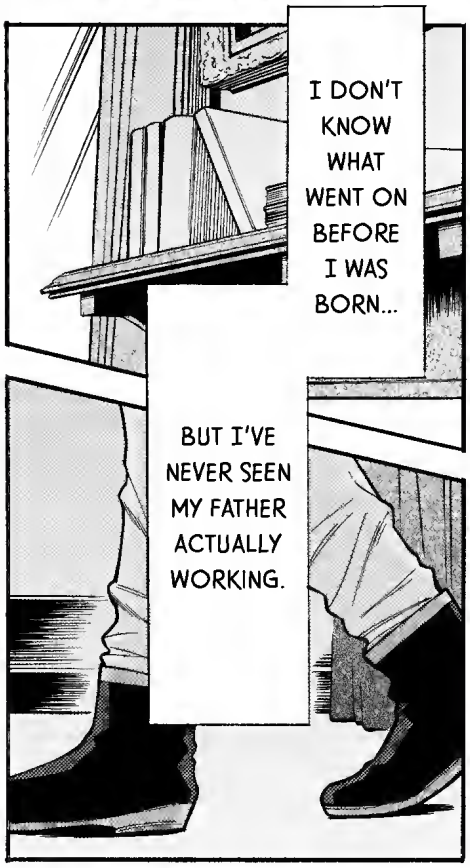
BECAUSE HE MADE ME WEAR ALL THOSE PRACTICALLY EVERY DAY.
BUT THIS ISN'T WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR. I DON'T WANT THE ACTRESS SUKEYO FUCHI'S DECORA-TIONS...
I WANT THINGS THAT COULD TEACH ME ABOUT IZANA HERSELF.
はっ
GASP

CREAK
THE ROOM WHERE MY MOTHER WAS...

IT'S SO EMPTY, IT'S HEART-BREAKING.
HAS NOTHING AT ALL LEFT INSIDE.

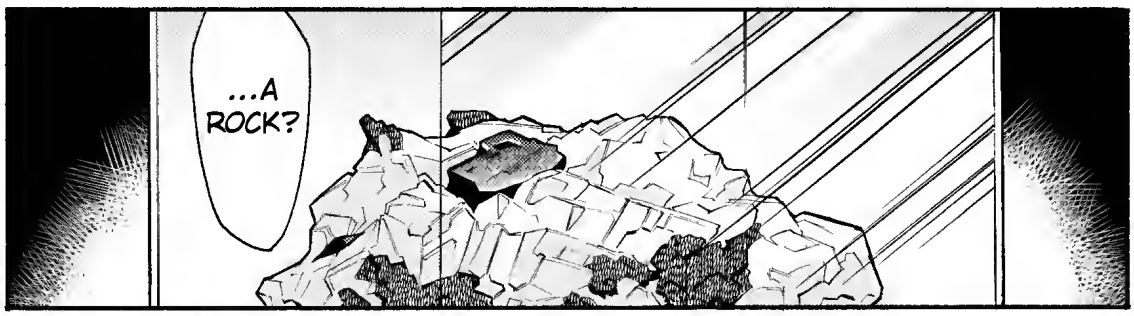

THUMP

TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
IF THERE'S NOTHING IN MY MOTHER'S ROOM...
OR IN THE ROOM THAT'S THE SOURCE OF THE REEK...
THEN IF THERE'S ANYTHING ELSE LEFT...
LISTEN, SUKEYO. YOU'RE NOT PERMIT-TED...
TO GO INTO MY OFFICE WITHOUT PERMIS-SION.
CLACK
CREAK


I DON'T KNOW WHAT WENT ON BEFORE I WAS BORN...
BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN MY FATHER ACTUALLY WORKING.

CRUMPLE
ANY-
THING
AT ALL.
SOMETHING
THAT WOULD
CONNECT
TO IZANA.
FATHER'S
OLD
DRAFTS
AND
MEMOS...
I DON'T
CARE
ABOUT
ANY OF
THIS GAR-
BAGE.
AND
THEN...

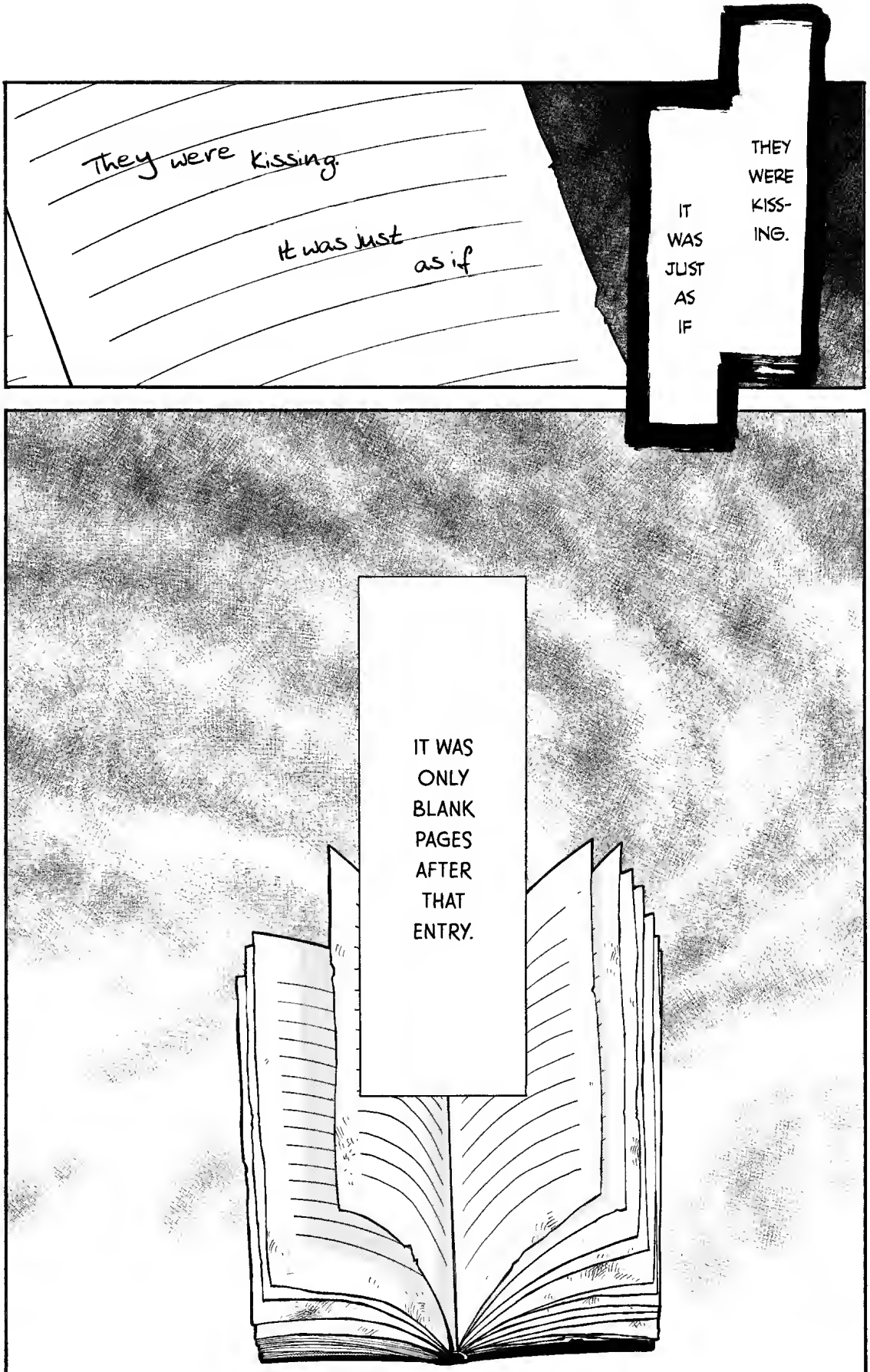
SOMETHING THAT COULD REVEAL HER SECRET!
THAT WAS WHEN...
SOMETHING RED FLASHED IN THE CORNER OF MY EYE.


...A ROCK?

"CINNA-BAR" ...
Cinnabar
Found in Guizhou, China
?
THERE'S SOME-THING UNDER-NEATH THE ROCK ...
TAP
ﾌﾄ...

A NOTE-BOOK?
THIS GIVES ME AN ODD FEELING, SOMEHOW ...
FLIP
THIS ISN'T MY FA-THER'S WRIT-ING.
"CRIM-SON ..."
"CRIM-SON THAT'S NOT CINNA-BAR" ...
FLIP
FLIP
FLIP
IT'S ALL PRETTY TECHNICAL, AND I DON'T REALLY UNDER-STAND IT.

that?
Was that Izana?
I'm so confused
It couldn't be
There's no way
There's power in that crimson?
But I saw it her face changed
She wasn't her anymore
Who was that?
Was that Izana?
They were kissing
It was just
as if
THE WRITING ON THIS PAGE IS WAY MESSIER THAN THE REST.
THIS IS...
I'M SO CONFUSED.
IT COULDN'T BE. THERE'S NO WAY.
THERE'S POWER IN THAT CRIMSON? BUT I SAW IT. HER FACE CHANGED.
SHE WASN'T HER ANYMORE.
WHO WAS THAT?
WAS THAT IZANA?
APPLYING THE CRIMSON LIKE IT WAS LIPSTICK.



Chapter Forty-Three: the end

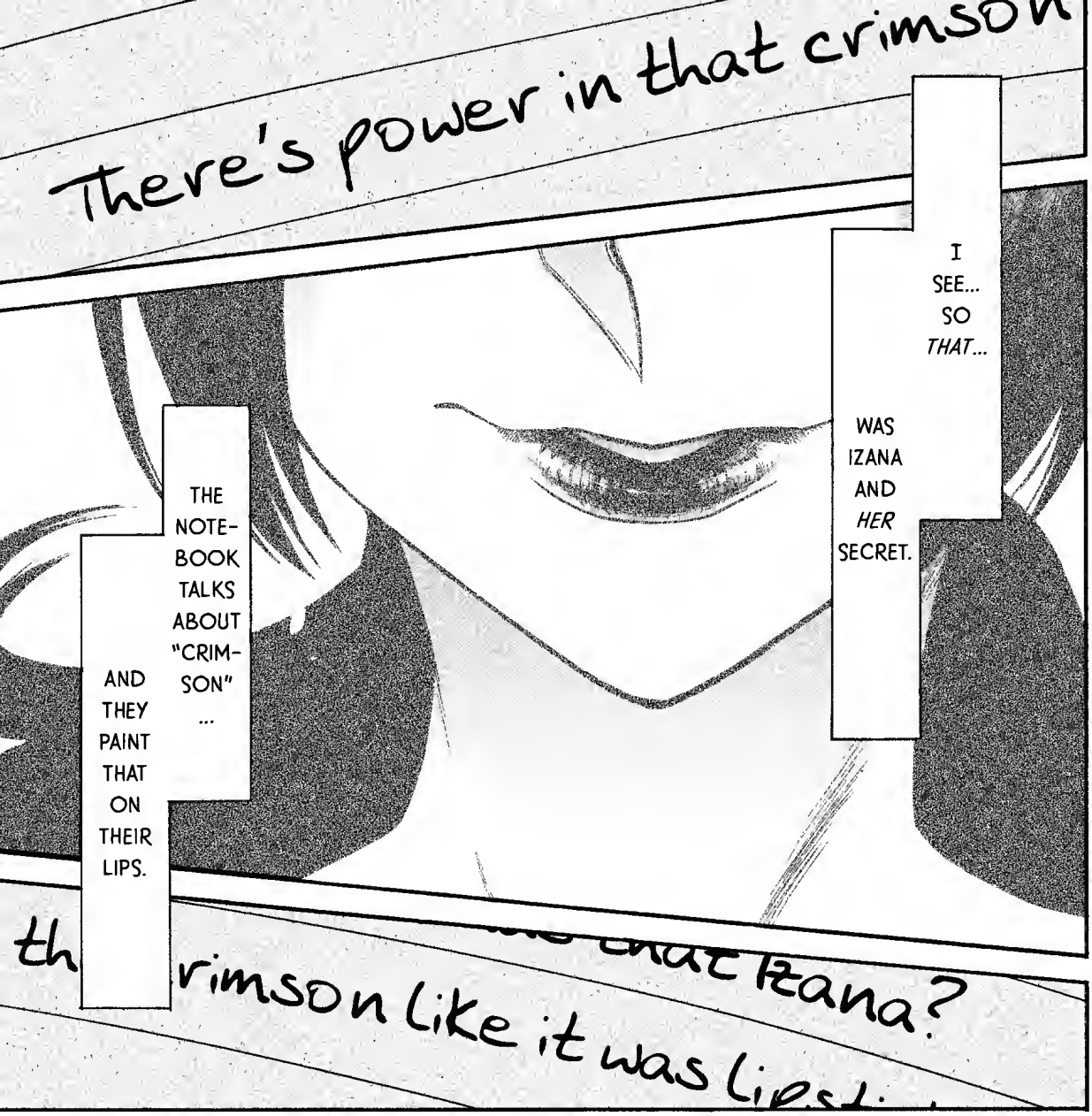
Chapter Forty-Four: Cracks

THUMP
WHAT THE HELL?
WHY DOES IT CUT OFF HERE?

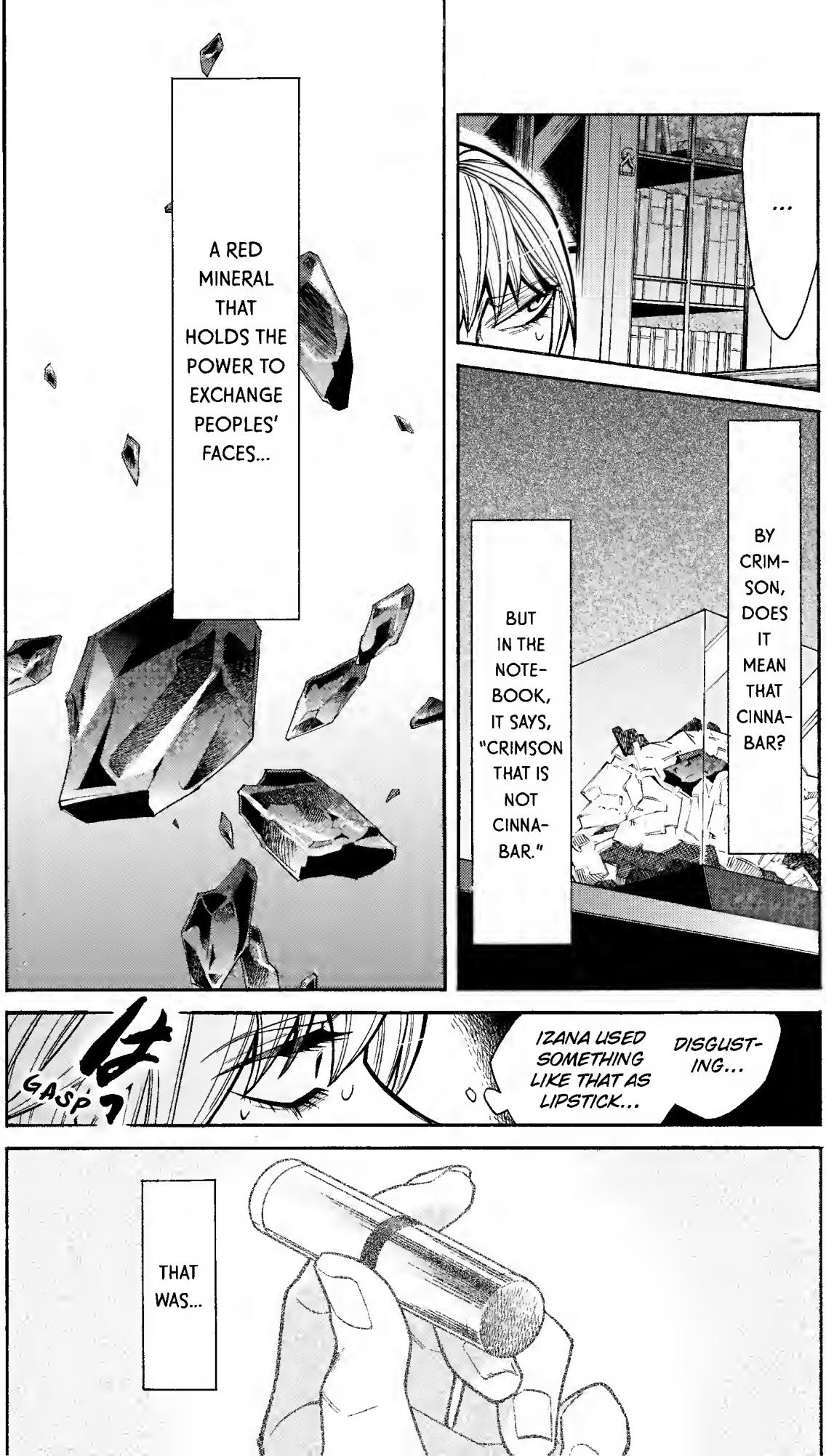
IZANA
...
HER FACE CHANG-ED.
KISS-ING...
LIP-STICK ...
IT REALLY IS THE LIPSTICK.

I REALLY DO LOOK JUST LIKE HER.
WITH THAT RED PAINTED ON...
DEEP CRIMSON LIPS...
ARE SUKEYO FUCHI'S TRADE-MARK.

THAT BLOOD-RED COLOR...!
THE LIP-STICK!
THUMP


There's power in that crimson
I SEE... SO *THAT*...
WAS IZANA AND *HER* SECRET.
THE NOTE-BOOK TALKS ABOUT "CRIM-SON" ...
AND THEY PAINT THAT ON THEIR LIPS.
th
rimson like it was lips!
Izana?

THEN BY KISSING SOME-ONE...
THEY STEAL HER FACE.


A RED MINERAL THAT HOLDS THE POWER TO EXCHANGE PEOPLES' FACES...
...
BY CRIMSON, DOES IT MEAN THAT CINNABAR?
BUT IN THE NOTEBOOK, IT SAYS, "CRIMSON THAT IS NOT CINNABAR."
GASP
IZANA USED SOMETHING LIKE THAT AS LIPSTICK...
DISGUSTING...
THAT WAS...

IT'S A MEMENTO OF MY MOTHER...
A LIPSTICK CASE...
SO IT WAS TRUE THAT IT WAS A "MEMENTO."
HEH HEH HEH ...
EVEN THEN ...
YOU WERE ...
NEENA ...
NO...
KA-SANE!
MY SPAR-KLING, BLUE MEMO-RY...
IS BEING PAINT-ED OVER IN VULGAR RED.

BIT BY BIT...BIT BY BIT, I'M GETTING CLOSER TO YOU.
I'M SURE ...
MY MOTHER IS GUIDING ME...
I'm going out tonight.
I'll be back in the morning.
=Nogiku
NO-GIKU-SAN?
I'M BA...

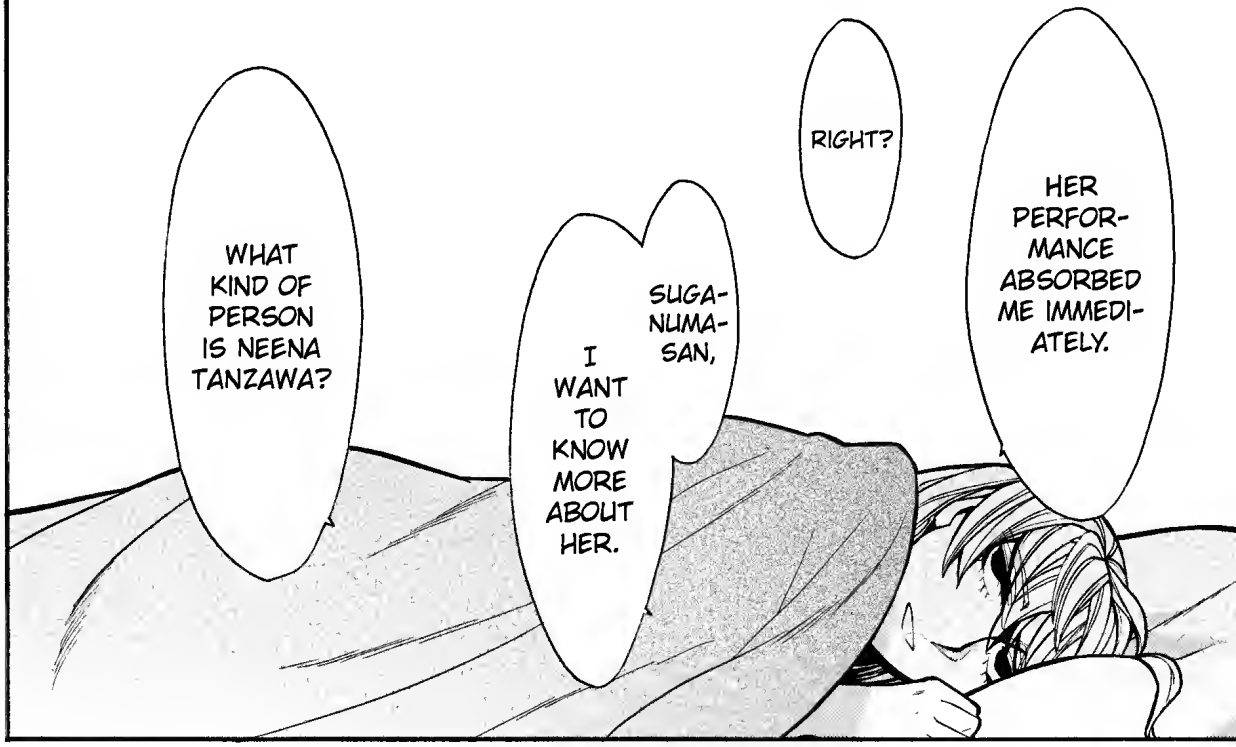
HOTEL
R²
YOU DIDN'T REPLY FOR A LONG TIME ...
SO I THOUGHT FOR SURE YOU WOULDN'T SEE ME AGAIN.
I'M SOR-RY.
I'VE BEEN BUSY LATELY.

IS THERE A WAY TO BLOCK THE POWER OF THAT LIPSTICK?

WHEN MY MOTHER WAS ALIVE, IN FRONT OF ME, SHE ALWAYS LOOKED LIKE IZANA.
SO IF KASANE HAS ALSO TAKEN HOLD OF NEENA'S FACE IN THE SAME WAY...
WOULD I BE POWERLESS TO CHANGE ANYTHING, EVEN IF I DID STEAL THE LIPSTICK?

NO...
IF I STEAL THE LIP-STICK,
THEN I MIGHT BE ABLE TO BRING WHAT IZANA AND KASANE HAVE DONE...
OUT INTO THE LIGHT OF DAY.
THEN I'LL BE ABLE TO TELL NEENA TANZAWA'S MOTHER THE TRUTH, TOO.
BUT...
STEALING SOMETHING THAT SHE CARRIES ON HER AT ALL TIMES...
IS PROB-ABLY IMPOS-SIBLE.
THEN...

NO-GIKU-CHAN...
YOU'VE LOST SOME WEIGHT, HAVEN'T YOU?
HAVE I...?
SUGA-NUMA-SAN...
THANK YOU FOR THE TICKET TO THAT SHOW...
THE OTHER DAY.
OH! SO YOU CAME TO SEE THE PERFOR-MANCE?
YES.
YOUJI SUGA-NUMA.
HE WAS PART OF SET DESIGN IN A PRODUCTION NEENA TANZAWA STARRED IN.
IT WAS ALL REALLY GOOD...
THE SET YOU MADE...
AND NEENA TANZAWA.

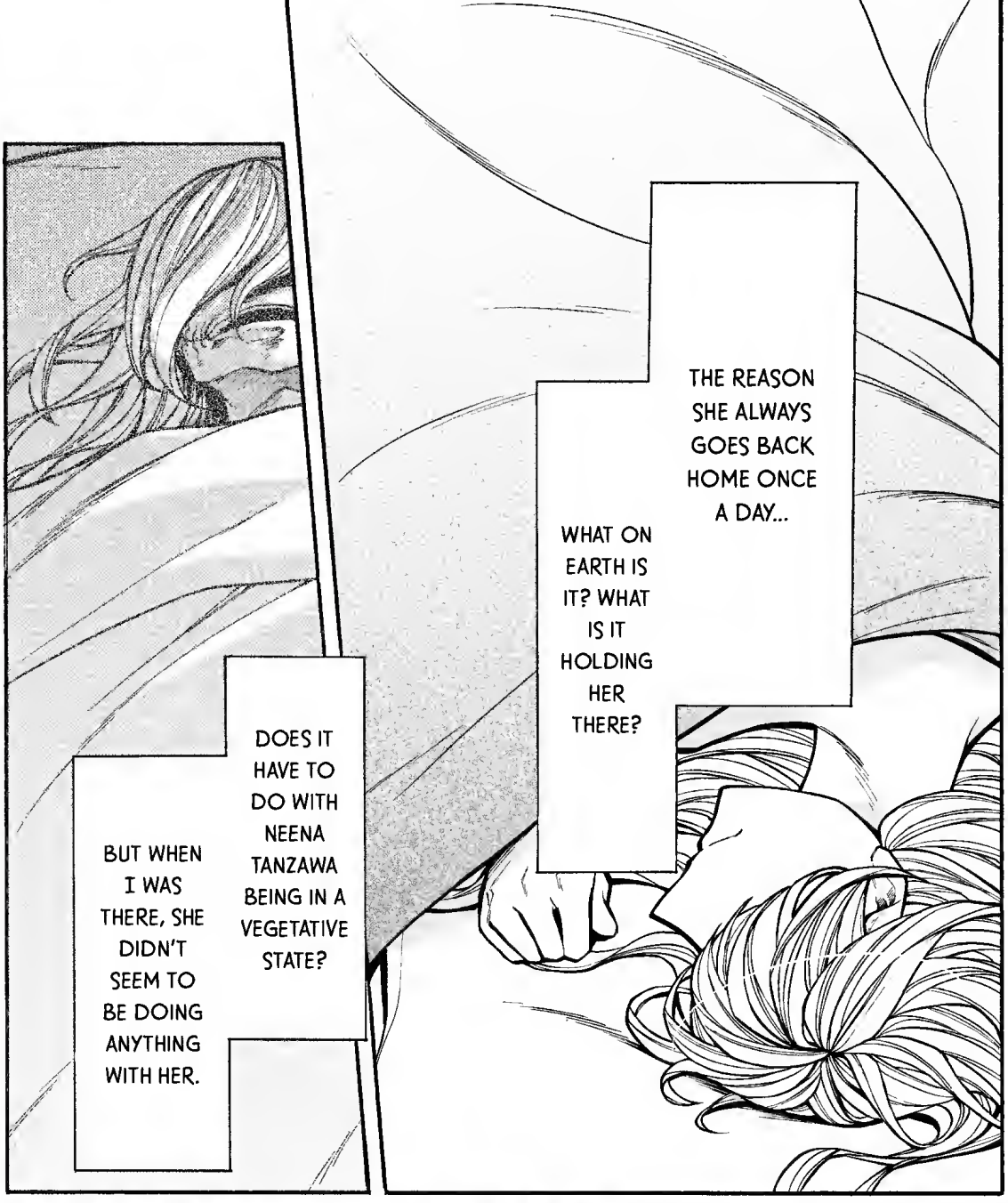

HER PERFOR-MANCE ABSORBED ME IMMEDI-ATELY.
RIGHT?
SUGA-NUMA-SAN,
I WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT HER.
WHAT KIND OF PERSON IS NEENA TANZAWA?

AND ABOUT THE LIP-STICK.
WELL ...
I HAVEN'T SPOKEN WITH HER ALL THAT MUCH, THOUGH.
MORE ABOUT HER,
I NEED TO FOCUS ON LEARNING EVERYTHING THERE IS TO KNOW.

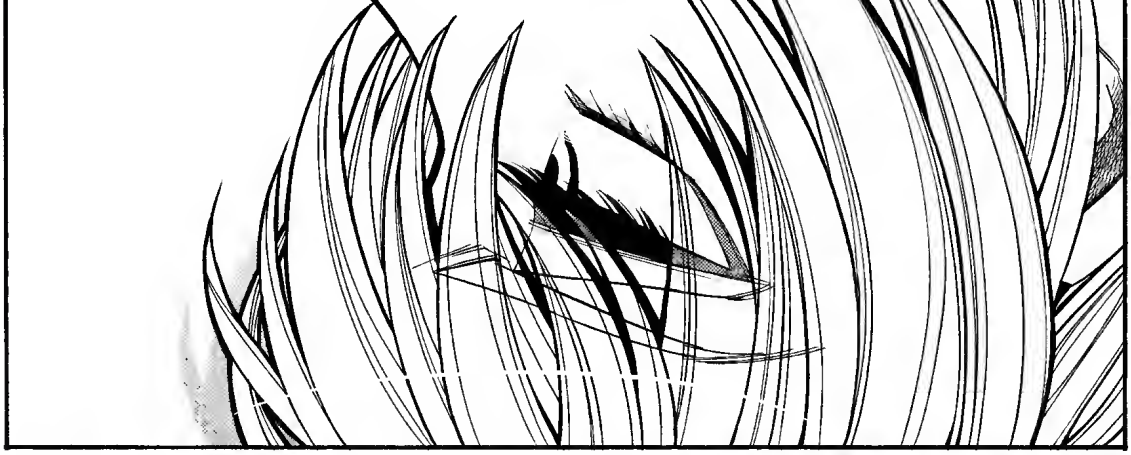
RIGHT NOW, I NEED TO KNOW ...
HMM ...

I GUESS YOU'D CALL HER MYSTERIOUS?
SHE DOESN'T ASSOCIATE WITH ANYONE.
SHE'S FRIENDLY ENOUGH, BUT...
SHE'S NEVER COME ONCE OUT TO DRINK WITH THE REST OF US AFTER REHEARSALS.
IS THAT STRANGE?
HUH?
IT'S NOT STRANGE...
BUT MOST PEOPLE WOULD CARE MORE ABOUT THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR COWORKERS, RIGHT?
HMM...

NOW THAT I THINK OF IT ...
IT'S LIKE SOMEHOW, HER RELATION-SHIPS WITH PEOPLE SEEM LACKING.
SHE APPARENTLY WON'T TAKE ANY JOBS THAT REQUIRE LATE-NIGHT PERFOR-MANCES.
AND SHE REFUSES PERFOR-MANCES OUT IN THE COUNTRY, OR ANYTHING SHE HAS TO STAY OVERNIGHT FOR.
I WONDER IF THERE'S SOME REASON SHE ALWAYS WANTS TO GO HOME.
THAT'S RIGHT. WHEN MEETING WITH ME, SHE ALWAYS LEFT AT THE SAME TIME.

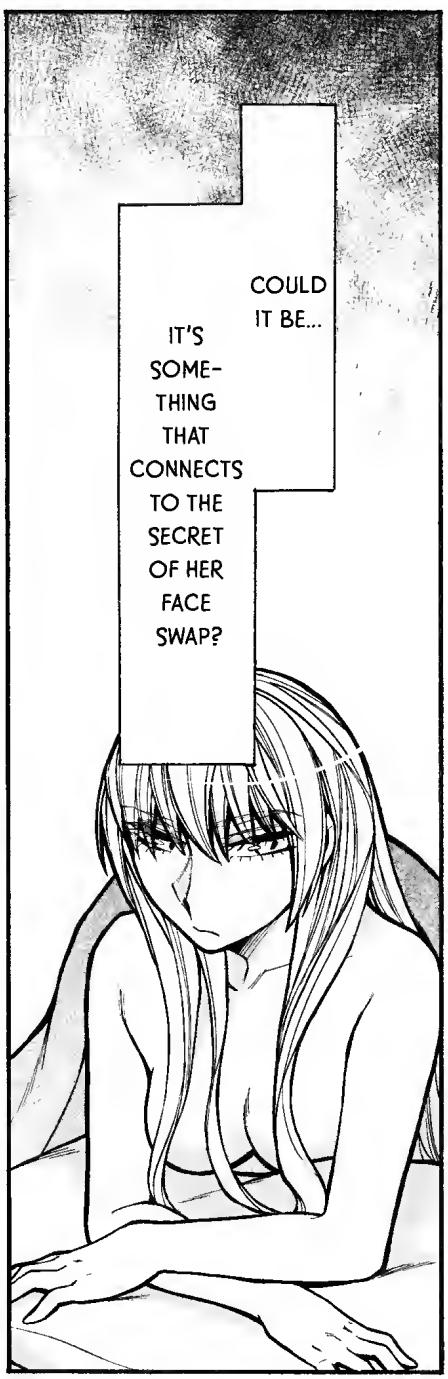

THE REASON SHE ALWAYS GOES BACK HOME ONCE A DAY...
WHAT ON EARTH IS IT? WHAT IS IT HOLDING HER THERE?
DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH NEENA TANZAWA BEING IN A VEGETATIVE STATE?
BUT WHEN I WAS THERE, SHE DIDN'T SEEM TO BE DOING ANYTHING WITH HER.

"HOLD ON RIGHT THERE FOR A SEC!
I'M GOING TO GO CLEAN THINGS UP."



HUH?
IT'S NOTH-ING.
JUST TALKING TO MYSELF.

IF SO, THEN...
MUTTER
I HAVE TO MAKE SURE ...


COULD IT BE...
IT'S SOME-THING THAT CONNECTS TO THE SECRET OF HER FACE SWAP?

PHEW
ALL RIGHT.
YEAH.
THIS TIME, TRY MAKING THE GESTURE OF BLOWING OUT THE CANDLE A LITTLE BIGGER.
MAKING THE ACTION BIGGER THAN BEFORE ...
BUT STILL SILENT,
AND SO FAINT, IT'S LIKE IT WOULD VANISH TOGETHER WITH THE FLAME.

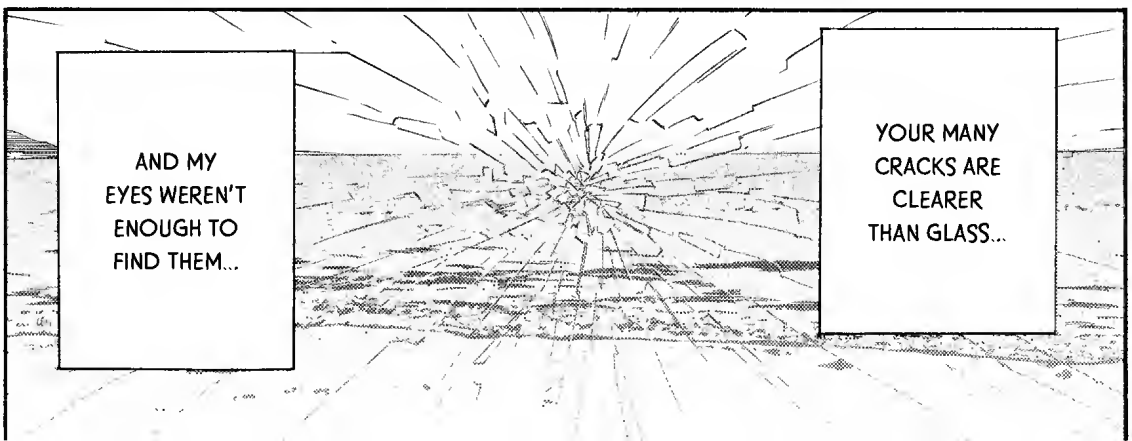
ﾌｩｰ

LAURA IS INTROVERTED AND HAS TROUBLE APPROACHING PEOPLE.
IN ORDER TO PLAY HER...

NICE.
IT'S TEN-DER.
VERY LIKE LAURA.

I ALWAYS RECALL YOU AT THE SEASIDE.
NOGIKU... YOU'RE A MYSTERIOUS PERSON.
YOU'RE NOT ARRO-GANT ABOUT YOUR NATURAL LOOKS.

ALWAYS QUIET,
YOU SEEM LONELY ...
AS IF YOU WOULD BREAK AT ANY MOMENT, IF TOUCHED.

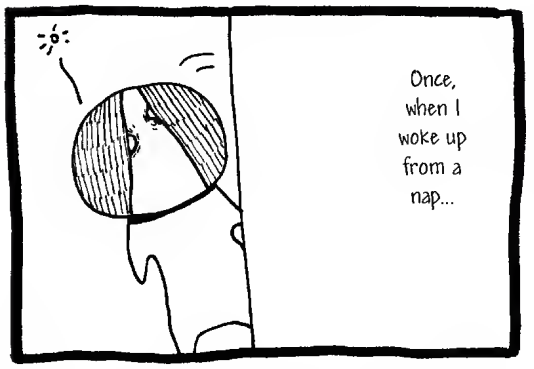

YOUR MANY CRACKS ARE CLEARER THAN GLASS...
AND MY EYES WEREN'T ENOUGH TO FIND THEM...

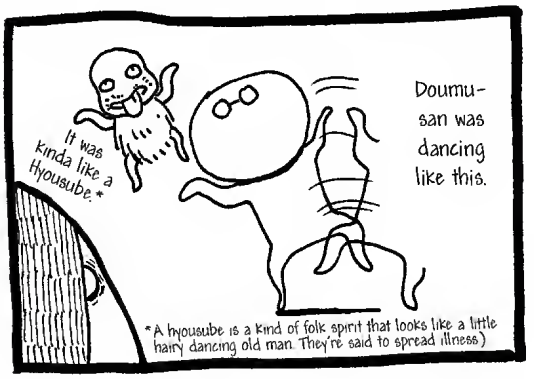
AND...
THE TERRI-FYING EXPRES-SION OF A WOMAN WHO HAS CREPT OUT FROM ...
THE ALREADY CRUM-BLED DEPTHS OF DARK-NESS.

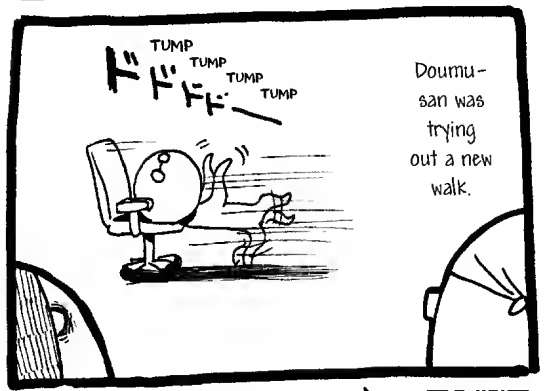
Hyperbolic Office Chamber D: The Sequel*

*My workplace (not an office)

My assistants are intense 2: The Doumu Kobayashi-shi Arc



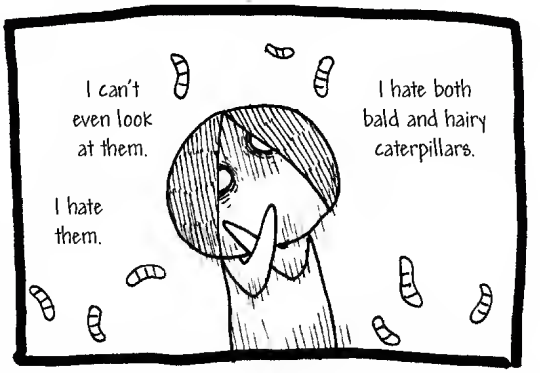


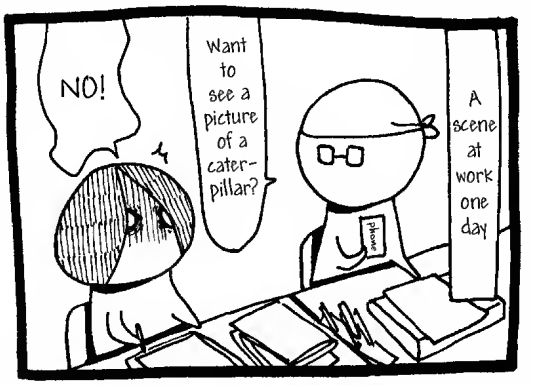


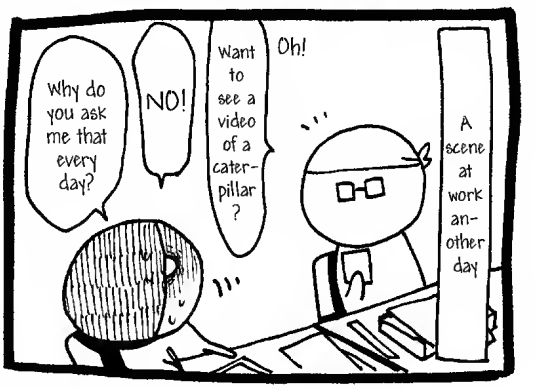
Doumu-san's "meat blog," also known as "Paru."

You can see some impressive meat cooking what is called "assistant food" at our workplace. By the way, it's crazy delicious.

My assistants are intense 1: Saburo Kirikakushi-shi Arc







You can read Kirikakushi-san's manga at the Hyenas Club

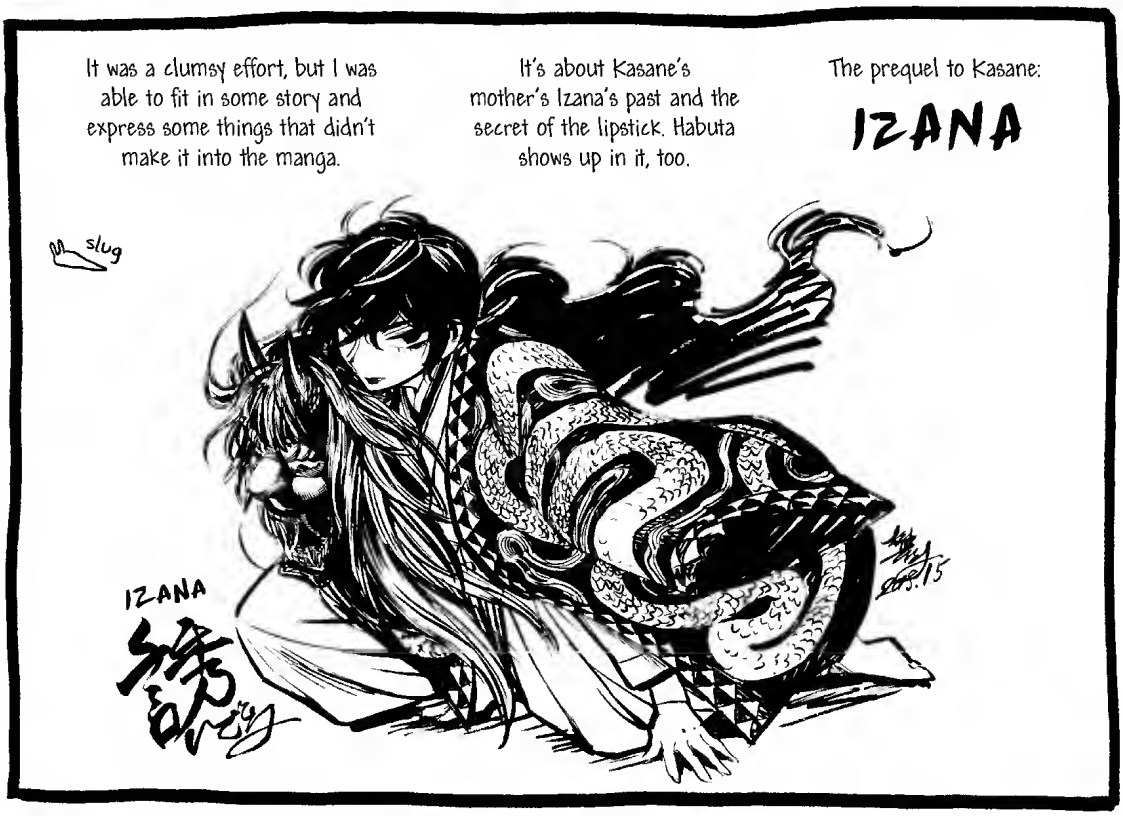
The other articles there are damn interesting.

This is an ad.

This is a tsuchinoko.*

*A tsuchinoko is a legendary creature that resembles a fat snake.

☆ Currently tweeting out new info about Kasane, and also harsh and emotion-less exchanges between me and my editor!



I'm out of time, but I still went overboard.

The End

Kasane 5

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English digital edition published by Kodansha Advanced Media, LLC, San Francisco.

www.kodanshacomics.com

ISBN: 9781682339008

Digital Edition: 1.0.0

Translation by Jennifer Ward
Lettering by Jacqueline Wee
Editing by Dawne Law
YKS Services LLC/SKY Japan, INC.